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Mad Tom Western, THE TEXAN RANGER; OR, THE QUEEN OF THE PRAIRIE.

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HAND," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE RANCH.

ON the northern branch of the Colorado river, in Texas, a new settler had built a ranch, and gathered his little family about him. He was a man entirely a stranger to the scattered settlers, coming from whence no one knew, nor was he apt to be communicative in this respect—a tall, well-shaped person, of middle age, who had been remarkably handsome, and who had some remains of his former stately grace upon him. His eyes retained their olden brightness, and his pale face wore a shadow which never left it. His family consisted of a wife, upon whose face the hidden sorrow which bore her husband down was reflected, and a daughter whose marvelous beauty became known through all that region. The men who peopled Texas at this time were not likely to ask many questions in reference to the antecedents of any man who might choose to take up his residence among them, so long as he did not *steal horses*, the most crying sin in the eyes of a frontier settler, and most likely to be punished by "short shift and sudden cord." The man answered to the name of Arthur Dunham.

Mabel Dunham was at this time in the zenith of her beauty, and was the admired of all the wild young settlers, before she had been six months in Texas. Young hunters, wandering trappers and scouts soon found a pretext for stopping often at the Dunham ranch, ostensibly for reasons connected with their craft, but in reality to bask in the smiles of the settler's daughter. She had a stately way of repelling all except mere friendly advances, which, while it did not make enemies, served to keep her admirers at a friendly distance. And, while all swore by her, and were ready to fight any man or beast in her defense, not one laid claim to any dearer right.

"Tell you what it is, lads," said Jack Fenway, an old member of McCullough's

Rangers, "that little gal knows how to make us keep our distance. Serves us right, too, for what man among us hez the right even to think of takin' that delicate little creature to his ranch? Lord love you, half on us ain't got a house to kiver us, and them as has, kin see the stars shine through the cracks on a clear night. We mouez well let the job out, till some one comes along that's more to the gal's mind."

"Seems to me that she needn't be so mighty uppish to them as means well by her," said a dark-browed, saturnine-looking young fellow in a red shirt, as he stroked his heavy mustache. "Her old father ain't no great shakes, I reckon."

"See here, Dick Dempsey," growled Fenway, sending a frowning glance at the speaker. "Don't you ride so rusty because the gal wouldn't have anything to say to you. She knows what she's up to, I judge."

Dempsey had no wish to get into a quarrel with Fighting Jack, a man famed far and wide

for feats of personal strength and daring, and he 'shut up' like the blade of a knife, although his dark eyes glittered under his heavy brows, as the band of Rangers rode on their way. They were out upon an expedition in search of a man who had stolen some horses from a ranch further down the river, and had been tracked to this point. Rough-bearded men, smooth-cheeked boys, men of every nation formed the motley group, and not one among them but would have risked his life in an Indian fight with the fiercest joy. Indeed, some of the most effeminate-looking men among them were the most desperate fighters in the band. True of heart, ready of hand, bold in the hour of danger, the Texan ranger is and has been all that is requisite for the make-up of a genuine frontiersman. They were all admirably mounted, for what man need ride a poor horse in a country where the prairies teemed with countless droves of wild horses, fleet as the Arabian, and as enduring and tireless, and having far greater strength.

They dashed through a grove of mesquit bushes which grew on a barren knoll, and struck a level bottom, dotted here and there with trees which grew in clumps and patches along the bottom-land, while through the center, the river ran sluggishly on to the gulf. Passing through one of these clumps, they came in sight of the ranch of Arthur Dunham, nestling down by the side of the stream, and already covered with creeping vines which the hands of Mabel and her mother had trained up since they had been in Texas. All the surroundings gave an air of thrift and comfort to the place, and the plain was dotted with cattle and horses, for Dunham proposed to go into stock-raising at a heavy rate. The foundation for a great house had been laid, and further on stood a cluster of small huts, for the accommodation of the stockmen.

"This yer Dunham will be a rich man in three years' time," said Jack, as they rode up. "He is workin' like a beaver."

As he spoke the band dashed up to the door of the ranch, and it opened, and Mr. Dunham came out and greeted them courteously.

"Glad to see you, square," said Jack. "Fam'ly all well?"

"We are doing finely, now that we have got used to the climate," said Mr. Dunham.

"Mabel was unwell for a month or so when we first came, but she is the picture of health now. What are the Rangers out for?"

"We are arter a cuss that



THE QUEEN'S RIVAL.

stole four hosses from Major Fenton, at Cypress Hollow. The cantankerous cuss struck across country from thar and we've tracked him so fur, but lost the trail jest above hyar. You ain't seen any strangers hyarabout?"

"I have not been here long enough to know who are strangers and who are not, Jack," replied Dunham. "Perhaps my stockmen may have seen the man you are after. Can you describe any of the stolen hosses?"

"Yes, one of 'em was a black mare, fifteen hands high, with a white fore-foot and a blaze on her left shoulder—as purty a beast as you ever straddled, square. The other hosses were the pick of the major's corrals, for these durned hoss-thieves know good property when they see it, they do. You don't catch none of them stealin' a poor hoss. Got sech a thing as a drink handy?"

Dunham looked into the house, and called to some one within, and a moment after Mabel Dunham appeared upon the threshold, carrying a wicker-jug capable of holding about a gallon, and some goblets, which she gave to her father, nodding pleasantly to trapper Jack, who looked at her in undisguised admiration.

"Texas be blowed," he said, "Texas kain't raise no sich gals as that, square. Miss Mabel, you orter be keeful how you show yourself, for the boys ar' only human, arter all, and it's only a tough old borderman like me that kin stand sich a pair of eyes as them."

It was a rough compliment, but it was heartfelt, and Mabel knew enough of the character of the Texan to take it as it was meant, and she smiled in answer to the compliment, while several of the younger Rangers blushed like girls and looked down.

"That durned old Jack," whispered one of them in the rear, to his file leader. "He's always got something to say, he has."

The jug was passed among the band and all took a huge drink, while Jack snacked his lips over his cup.

"Ah—h—h! Real old peach, ain't it, square? I wish that thar river overflowed with sech licker, I do."

"It wouldn't do," said Dempsey, plucking up courage. "The Comanche would come down and hev the country, if it took the lives of half the tribe. And the Yankee traders would come and barrel it up so fast that a native couldn't git a drink for love or money."

"Twouldn't do fur you to live on the bank of a peach brandy river," said Jack, holding out his glass to be refilled. "Yaas, square, I think I will do it ag'in, seein' it's you. Hyar, boys; eyes on me. Here's to the health of Mabel Dunham, the brightest flower that ever bloomed on the prahary gardens of this Western clime, and the man that refuses the toast will git my fist clean through him, that's all."

Nobody refused it, and after an uproarious cheer the band dashed on, headed by Jack, taking the direction of the stockmen's cabins. Mabel looked after them with an amused smile.

"What a strange party, father!"

"Strange, indeed, my daughter," replied Dunham. "And yet, rude and rough as he is, unpunished in behavior, I would sooner trust my life in the hands of Jack Fenway than any man I know."

"Jack? I dote on him, he is such a capital study, and his admiration of me is so open and undisguised," she said, laughing.

"And yet, he gave you good advice, my dear girl. You are beautiful—too beautiful to be buried in this wild region, and must look to it that you give no encouragement to any of these wild young fellows."

"I am very careful, father," she said; "and as for Texas, I love it. I was never free before. The bracing air of the South does me good; I seem to live a new life, and would not change for the old life if I could do it to-morrow."

"That is the right spirit, Mabel. Yes, we will bid good-by forever to the old scenes, and strive to build up in this country a new name, which shall cast no discredit upon the name we once bore. Oh, my God! that I, of all men, should be the one to cast reproach upon it."

"Father, father, what do you mean? You cast reproach upon the old name, you, always so noble, good and kind. You have not done it; you never can."

"There, Mabel, it is over. I forget myself at times, and say wild, foolish things. But I will forget it. I have forgotten it. *Retro Sathanus!* You have no power over my soul."

His attitude was lofty as graceful, as he raised his hand, and seemed to beat back some accusing spirit which beset him. Mabel looked at him in utter surprise, and just then the door

opened, and there appeared Mrs. Dunham, who laid her hand upon her husband's arm with an imploring gesture.

"Arthur, remember your promise to me. Mabel, my dear, you have not taken a ride this morning. Had you not better get a horse, and leave us for a while?"

Mabel understood her, and went into the house, from which she soon came out with her hat in her hand, and walked down to the stock huts, where she caught a ragged Mexican boy and sent him for her horse. Ten minutes after she was dashing away across the prairie at a rapid pace, forgetting everything else in the exhilaration of the moment.

The fresh air, the clear sky, and everything about her combined to make her ride a pleasant one; and she kept on for over an hour, riding with a free rein, her eyes drinking in the beauty of the glorious landscape through which she rode. In that delicious languor which steals over any one in this climate in the springtime, she forgot time and distance, her mustang swaying beneath her like a wave, as, with that long gallop peculiar to his race, he seemed to devour the way. Suddenly he slackened his speed slightly, and began to drop into a walk, in spite of the warning shake of the rein she gave him, and then stopped at once, planted his fore feet upon the sward, and refused to budge an inch, as with half-averted head, erected ears and trembling flank, he uttered a slow snort of terror.

"Go on, Selim," she said, patting him gently on the shoulder. "Courage; there is nothing to fear."

But, the magnificent horse would not move, and her eyes began to wander about her, in the desire to see what it was which aroused his fears so strongly. She knew that it must be something more than common, for the mustang had been the war-steed of a chief, killed in one of the battles with the Comanche, and was trained to battle. What could it be which caused him such abject fear?

"Go on, Selim," she cried.

He moved a little, but the moment after stopped again, and planted his feet as before. She saw now what it was which frightened him, and with a cry of horror, covered her face with her open palms.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHAPARRAL TRAIL.

JUST in front a single tree had sprung up from the prairie bottom, and in one of the freaks of nature had divided about a foot from the ground, forming two distinct trunks. Nearly ten feet from the earth, a great limb ran out in a horizontal direction, and from this limb swung a ghastly corpse, the body of a man who had been hanged but a short time. The head was on one side, the face was purple, and the protruding tongue seemed to mock her. Upon the breast was a huge placard, upon which was written, with a blood-red stain of some kind, by the finger of a man, these words:

"HORSE-THIEF.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

Hanged March 3d, 18—, by order of
THE RANGERS."

It was a striking commentary upon these days in Texas, when the only law they had was the law of Judge Lynch. They had caught this man with stolen horses in his possession, formed a hasty court, and meted out justice to him according to their creed. It was their only protection, and, as a general rule, they did not abuse the great trust in their hands. A fair trial, impartial justice, and a rigid penalty, was all they had to give. Mabel looked once at the horrible object, long enough to see that he was a brutal-looking ruffian, and then, drawing rein, she fled as fast as the mustang could go, in her haste taking no notice of the direction. She rode hard for an hour, and began to look for her father's cabin, when she became aware that she was in a section of country which she had never before visited. The ground was more broken, and the way more difficult, and the growths of mesquit bushes and cactus-like plants showed that she had left the bottom-land and reached the ridges, out of the way of her father's house. She pushed on blindly, in great fear lest she should be lost, looking anxiously from side to side for something which might guide her to her home. But she looked in vain, and as she proceeded the way became more difficult and the chaparral more thick. She pulled up and looked about her. The river was nowhere in sight, and on every side arose the low chaparral, the cactus, and all the signs of the vegetable life of the sterile ridges. She knew that these ridges were many miles from her

father's house, although she had never visited them before, and in her aimless wanderings over the prairie, she had gone further than she had thought. There was nothing for her to do but to turn back and endeavor to retrace her steps by following her own trail.

With this object in view she wheeled and rode slowly back, pausing now and then to satisfy herself that she was on the right track. But her course was necessarily slow, and she began to fear that she was destined to pass a night upon the prairie. Passing a thick growth of mesquit bushes, she had paused again in uncertainty, for the earth was hard at this point, and scarcely left a trace, when, with a yell of delight, a painted Comanche leaped out from the thicket, and before she could move grasped her horse by the bridle.

Mabel was no coward; but at the sight of that huge and homely painted figure, her heart stood still, for she saw before her a vision of a captivity among the Comanches, a terrible fate to one who had heard repeated the frontier tales of the horrors of that captivity. The man before her was one of the most gigantic of his race, a perfect forest Hercules. In height he was considerably above six feet, with shoulders and arms which bespoke the possession of enormous strength. His dress was one of the most gaudy worn by the Comanches, a buck-skin shirt, profusely ornamented with silver lace and bullion, and left open on the breast, displaying muscles of which a gladiator might have been proud. A huge silver brooch, carved with strange characters and totems, was suspended about his neck by a chain of the same metal; his leggings were fringed with the hair taken from the scalps of the enemies he had killed in battle, and about his neck, below the brooch, hung a necklace of grizzly's claws, which none among the Indians can wear unless he has killed the fierce beast with his own hand. His right hand grasped a spear of great length, while his bow and quiver were suspended at his back.

Upon his head he wore a sort of skull-cap, in which waved three heron-plumes, the insignia of a chief. As to his paint, it was simply horrible, and gave him a wild and sinister expression. His keen black eyes were fastened upon the maiden, with a look which she could not understand, as with his left hand restraining the plunging horse, and a fierce smile upon his dark face, he stood before her.

What was this Comanche doing so far from the home of his tribe, alone upon the ridges, and on foot? If Mabel had known the character of the great tribe he represented, she would hardly have asked the question. No tribe upon the American plains are more lawless or fearless of danger than the Comanche. Bold riders, brave as lions, admirably disciplined, they had never known what defeat was until they had met the Texan Rangers, and for the first time knew what it was to contend with foemen worthy of their steel. The Mexicans they held in utter contempt, and a band of this tribe have been known to dash down upon an exposed Mexican city, pick up great quantities of plunder, strip the country of horses and cattle, and ride away at their leisure, with a company of prisoners in their train. They tried the same game upon the Texans, and how they succeeded, let Texan history show. Their first raids gave birth to the Texan Rangers, men who were as fearless as they and far better armed, and their fights were terrible ones indeed.

"Release the bridle," cried Mabel, boldly, striking the Indian with her riding whip.

The chief shook his head with a grim smile, and retained his hold upon the bridle, when the brave girl brought the lash down upon the horse's flank. Smarting under the blow, he gave a mighty spring, and the Comanche staggered, but, bracing himself to the effort, he forced the strong horse resolutely backward until he almost rested upon his haunches, and held him as in a vise. The mustang felt the hand of a master, and Mabel knew that he was conquered, but she would not give up the struggle yet. Her hand dropped into the pocket in her saddle, and when she took it out she held a bright-barreled pistol, which she essayed to unlock, but the Comanche was too quick for her. Dropping his spear, his strong right hand shot out and wrenched the weapon from her grasp, and the next moment she was lifted from the saddle, and deposited upon the earth, as easily as if she had not weighed ten pounds. But, no sooner did her feet touch the earth than she ran, plunging into the thick growth of chaparral, careless of the long thorns which lacerated her flesh.

Her only thought was to escape, at any and

every hazard, from the grasp of the Comanche. Only one thing saved her for a moment, and that was the dislike of a savage to lose so fine a horse as the one she had ridden, and he stopped long enough to plunge his spear deep into the earth, throw the end of the lariat coiled upon the saddle about it and fasten it firmly before he started in pursuit. By this time Mabel had gained some fifty yards into the chaparral, where she found a number of narrow paths, running in various directions. Into one of these she plunged in desperate haste, caring nothing for the course it took, as long as it was away from the Comanche, who was now crashing through the bushes behind. There was something in her favor, although she did not know it, and if her strength endured, there was some little chance of escape. The Comanche, living as he did almost entirely in the saddle, is a poor footman, and his wind is not good in a long run. In this he differs materially from the Eastern Indians, who, living in a region where horses were unknown, were accustomed to make long journeys on foot. Had it been a Sioux or a Delaware, the probability is that she would have been overtaken in the first five hundred yards, even buoyed up by desperation as she was.

She ran on, looking neither to the right hand or the left, plunging deeper and deeper into the thicket, until the sound of pursuing feet died away in the distance. She paused and listened intently. Yes, it was indeed true; she had escaped from the hands of her merciless enemy, and he had doubtless given up the pursuit. Utterly exhausted, she sunk breathless on the ground in a state of complete exhaustion, panting for breath. Hearing the trickling of a tiny stream, she raised her head to look for it, and saw its silver thread winding away through the chaparral a few yards distant. She dragged herself to the bank, and lying down, took a copious draught, and felt herself refreshed and sat up.

"Escaped," she murmured, "but, where am I? Lost in the chaparral; escaped from one danger only to fall into another."

She rose and looked about her. Not a sound was heard save the murmur of the breeze through the bushes, and the trickling of the little stream at her feet. Alone in the boundless chaparral, without a guide, and night coming on! Even if she should make her way out, perhaps she might again fall into the clutches of the giant Comanche, who had so frightened her before, and she decided, at all hazards, to remain where she was, at least for a time.

She sat down upon a mossy knoll and waited nearly an hour. Then she rose and looked at the sun, which she could distinguish through the opening in the bushes above her head. Knowing that it was now nearly five o'clock, she was enabled to get the points of the compass, and she remembered that she had been traveling nearly west when she was surprised by the Comanche. She would go on her way, guided by the sun.

She drank once more at the stream and began her course. It became more rough and difficult as she proceeded, and after an hour's travel she paused and looked about her in despair. It was plain that she was going deeper and deeper into the chaparral, and she had heard the scouts tell strange tales of the sufferings of those lost in that wild region.

Was she doomed to suffer as they, and die in this wild solitude, and lie there unburied, her friends having no knowledge of her fate?

The thought was madness, and she made a new effort, but only to find herself in greater difficulties. She stopped beside a pool and drank some water, which relieved her somewhat, and then sunk upon her knees and prayed to the God she had worshipped through life to support and direct her under this affliction. When she rose from her knees the sun had gone down, and she had only the red glare in the west to guide her, and she gave up the attempt to get out of the chaparral that night. Collecting some dry leaves and moss, she made herself a bed beneath the trees, and lay down, and, utterly worn out, slept peacefully in the midst of solitude. Dangers of which she had no knowledge passed her by. A poisonous snake crossed the moss within a foot of her and glided on into the darkness. A tarantula, black and venomous, lumbered over the leaves a few feet away, and a jaguar went through the chaparral, twenty yards distant, looking out for prey, and this innocent girl slept on, her cheek pillowed on her rounded arm. God surely watches over the innocent in their hour of danger, and so he watched over Mabel Dunham.

The sun rose, and she awoke refreshed, but hungry, and there was nothing which she dared to eat. Searching her pockets she found a few crumbs of cake, which she ate slowly, thinking them the sweetest morsels she had ever tasted. A genuine border woman would have found food in plenty in ten minutes, but Mabel had that Eastern dread of poisonous tropical plants and fruits, and would touch nothing. Having eaten all the crumbs, she drank at the spring, and rose to begin again her perilous search, with but little hope of success. In running from the Indian she had taken such devious paths that to retrace her steps was impossible, and she was about to guide herself by the sun again, when she uttered a low cry of joy, as her eyes fell upon a mark upon the earth, apparently quite fresh. It was the trail of a horse, and, close beside it, the track of a boot deeply imprinted in the soft earth.

She looked at it eagerly and satisfied herself that it was not more than a day old. It was not an Indian who had ridden the horse, for she was aware that they always wore moccasins. It might be a Mexican, but even if it were, and she should meet him, he would guide her out of the jungle, and her only hope was to follow this trail wherever it might lead.

She started forward at once, following the chaparral path through which the trail led. It was quite plain, so plain that a child might have followed it, and she hurried eagerly on. After a half-hour's walk she noticed that other trails led into this one, all of mounted men, until she was traversing a path beaten by many horses' feet. What could it mean? What men were these who congregated in the chaparral, coming from all points of the compass?

Something lay in the road at her feet. She picked it up and found that it was a haversack. Fainting from the lack of food she opened it eagerly, and to her great joy found some cold venison and corn-bread, and giving up the trail for the present she sat down and ate. Finishing her repast, she put the rest of the food into the haversack, and throwing the strap over her shoulder, again began her march over the trail. For three long hours she kept on her course, almost giving up hope as she saw that the chaparral was dark and dense upon each side, when she was startled by a well-known sound.

It was the distant neighing of a horse, and she knew that she was approaching some camp.

Whose camp was it? What were they doing here?

If she had been less desperate she might have hesitated about entering a place of this kind. But, she knew it was only a choice of two dangers—to reveal herself or perish of starvation, for to find her way out of the chaparral now was simply impossible.

The sounds of life grew louder as she proceeded, and she could even distinguish the laughter of men and women, and she became more at her ease. No true woman would stand by and see her wronged, not even a Mexican woman. She was about to hasten on, when she heard the sudden beat of horses' feet, and paused to see who were coming up, when two horsemen came suddenly into view, who uttered simultaneous cries of surprise and anger as they saw her.

"Who is that?" cried one, harshly. "Seize her, Coradi; we will have no interlopers here."

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET HAUNT.

THE men rode up hastily, and as they came, pulled down a sort of visor concealed beneath their sombreros, which completely hid their faces. They were both dressed in green hunting-suits of the same cut and make, and Mabel looked at them in surprise.

"A woman here!" cried one of the men who had spoken first. "Let me hear you speak. What do you want here?"

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said Mabel. "I did not willingly intrude upon you, but I was forced to do it."

"Explain, and at once. By Jove, Coradi," he muttered in an undertone, "there is not another such a beauty in Texas!"

"You are right, camarade mio," replied the other. "She is a beauty without doubt. But let us hear her story, for after what has happened it will be difficult to dispose of her."

"Lady," said the first speaker, "tell me what you are doing here?"

Mabel complied, and told the whole story of her ride, her meeting with the Comanche and escape from him into the chaparral, while the two listened intently.

"Your story is a strange one, lady, but I do not doubt its truth. No one would willingly come into this section. May I ask your name?"

"Mabel Dunham. My father lives upon the Colorado, but where I am I do not know."

"Dunham!" said the other, with a start of surprise, looking at her intently. "Did you say Dunham?"

"Yes; why do you ask the question?"

"Because the name is familiar to me. I was once quite intimate with a man of that name—in Arkansas. What the deuce are we to do with her, Coradi? It won't do to take her into camp," he added, *solito voce*.

"I'll go in and give the office to the rest. You keep her in conversation until you hear the bugle," Coradi answered, in the same tone.

He rode hastily away, leaving Mabel alone with his comrade. She looked at him with some fear, for she did not like his ways. Why did he conceal his face, and show such visible signs of surprise when she mentioned the name of Dunham? Why had his companion ridden in advance, and left them together?

"From the sounds which we hear, you will see that there is a camp in front, and my comrade has gone on to see what can be done for you. We will wait here until he gives us a signal. Miss Dunham, I am about to trust you with a secret, which I am sure you will respect. If I promise to guide you safely out of this, will you agree on your part to keep silent in regard to what you see in this place?"

"Certainly; what reason have I to tell it?"

"But, I must have your promise."

"You have it then. I give you my word not to tell any thing I may see, to any one whatever. Does that satisfy you?"

"It does," replied the man, allowing his eyes to dwell upon the beautiful face of the girl, with a fixed, ardent glance, under which her eyes sunk. At this moment a bugle was blown faintly, and he sprang from the saddle.

"Take my place, I beg you," he said. "You must, for you are worn out."

It required little persuasion to induce her to take his place in the saddle, for she was completely exhausted, and he led the horse gently forward.

"I have not told you the secret I proposed, as yet," he said, kindly, "but you shall hear it to-night."

"To-night! I must return home, this very day."

"Satisfy yourself. You are too weary to undertake a ride of thirty miles after the fatigues you have undergone. I will send any letter you may choose to write to your father, by a swift rider, who will reach the ranch long before you could, and you may say that you are among friends, and will return to-morrow."

"I accept your offer, sir, for I think it kindly meant upon your part."

"Then I will introduce you to a lady who will attend to your wants for the night. In the morning, I myself will show you the way to the cabin of your father."

They emerged from the bridge-path and found themselves in front of one of those strange old buildings which the enterprise of American explorers are bringing to light every year; one of the wonderful temples of the Aztecs as it stood when that strange people traversed the land from the north, seeking a place where they might rest, led by the guardian eagle of their tribe. It is a beautiful legend which says that the bird flew above them and led them on through their varied journeyings, and when they reached the valley of Mexico, perched upon their banner and died. In their journeyings from the north, they stopped at various points, and Western Texas is peculiarly rich in the ancient ruins of the works their hands built up. Centuries have passed, their bones have crumbled, their weapons are dust, but these old buildings remain to show that men of the olden times were further advanced in the art of solid and beautiful architecture than the men of the present.

The building was in the form of a rectangle, and the walls had been put together with a nicety unknown in our day, and with a cement the secret of which is lost. The roof was gone, the doors had crumbled, and the accumulating vegetable deposits had been heaped about the walls until only a small portion remained. Doubtless many such ruins remain undiscovered in the dense chaparrals of the south, which succeeding years will bring to light, to give further evidence of the wonderful artistic skill of the people who have no longer a name and race. Mabel stood in mute wonder, regarding the ruined temple, and her companion studied her face.

"You are surprised, Miss Dunham," he said. "I myself discovered this place, and I would not barter my knowledge of it for a kingdom. I

have discovered here the Aztecs' sacred secret, and the key to their peculiar language, and in time I will make my discovery known to the world. This is the secret which I would hide, and which you have promised never to reveal to a living creature."

"I have given my word of honor and I will keep it," said Mabel.

"That is sufficient. Let me assist you to alight."

He helped her lightly out of the saddle, and drawing the picket-pin from the saddle, drove it into the earth and fastened the horse. Then, taking her by the hand, he led her into the rectangular space through the lofty-arched doorway, and she stood in a space nearly two hundred feet across, in which, to her surprise, she found several men lounging about, every one of whom had the sort of uniform which was worn by the man who led her, and wore a visor like his. They cast curious glances at the new-comer but said nothing. Against the inner wall of the rectangle a number of huts had been built, and toward one of these the man who appeared to be the leader advanced and tapped at the door. It was opened quickly and a woman looked out.

"Good-day, Zillah," said the leader. "I hope you are well?"

"I am well, Brinsley," she said. "I am glad to see you safe back; but who is this lady?"

"She will tell you, doubtless, since I wish you to take her in charge, and attend to her wants. Make her welcome, for she has suffered much in the last twenty-four hours."

The woman extended her hand kindly to Mabel and led her into the hut, and the man called Brinsley followed her. Once inside, Mabel had leisure to look at her companion, and was startled at her wonderful beauty. She might have been twenty years of age, but not more. Her face was of the dark, passionate brunette type of the south, and Mabel decided at once that she had Mexican blood in her veins. Her head was uncovered, and her glorious wealth of dark hair floated to her waist, unconfined, and of wonderful abundance. Her figure was slight but symmetrical, and showed to advantage in the costume of a Mexican woman. A kirtle of red cloth was covered partly by an overskirt of green stuff confined at the waist by a belt with a golden clasp, in which she wore a dagger with a silver hilt. Over the skirt was a red bodice, slashed and embroidered with gold lace, and her feet were covered by moccasins of dainty make. The face was oval, with deep black eyes, full of hidden fire, and Mabel stood looking at her in surprise.

"You ask me to be kind to this lady, Brinsley," she said, softly, "and I will do it."

"A word with you first, Zillah. Miss Dunham will excuse us for a moment, I am sure."

They went out of the cabin, and moved far enough from the door so that Mabel could hear them had she chosen to listen.

"You are a study to me, Brinsley Nelson," said the woman called Zillah. "I want an explanation of this, and at once. Why have you brought this girl here?"

"Don't get into one of your 'tantrums,' my dear," said the man, lightly. "I assure you that it is all an accident and could not be avoided without inhumanity."

"Inhumanity! I like that from *your* lips, Brinsley."

He began to be angry, and made a fierce gesture with his right hand.

"You are too captious, by far, Zillah. When I have explained this matter to you I am sure you will say that I could have done nothing less than that which I have. We found this lady wandering in the chaparral, to which she had escaped from a Comanche Indian. She had lost her way and by some unlucky accident struck the main track by which we have been accustomed to enter the Retreat, and we found her and brought her in."

"Is this the truth?"

"Ask Coradi; he was with me when I found her."

"My brother will not deceive me, and you would not have referred to him if you had not told the truth. Forgive me, Brinsley, for there are times when my love for you is apt to lead me astray. I love you, and you know my jealous nature."

"There, there, Zillah; compose yourself. You thought this unfortunate child a rival, then? She is beautiful, but an infant compared to you, my queen of the plains. Besides, she goes home to-morrow, and probably we shall never see her again; certainly not with my consent."

"Thank you, Brinsley. I was mad to doubt

you. Shall I see you again before you leave the Retreat?"

"I am not going out to-day at all, for I have promised to wait until morning, and show this lady the road home. Besides, the Rangers are out again, and I have my own reasons for not falling in their way at present. Be careful not to give her any hint as to who we are."

She left him and returned to the cabin, and Nelson walked out of the rectangle and threw himself upon the green grass outside, where he lay in deep thought, his head resting upon his hand.

"Dunham," he muttered. "As I live for vengeance I never hoped to meet him here. He, the man who drove me out from society—made me a Pariah and outcast, and forced me into this wild life, has been thrown against me once more in the changing currents of life! Shall I seize the chance or not, that is the question? I have it in my power to raise a storm about his ears which could only end in his annihilation. Shall I do it?"

A step on the greensward made him look up, and he saw the man who had come in with him.

"Ah, Coradi," he said. "Have you attended to everything needful?"

"All is right," replied the man. "She will suspect nothing."

"You cautioned them to keep quiet; I would not have her see any more than those present."

"They understand it, and I doubt if they could make noise enough to come to her ears. Have you left her with Zillah?"

"Yes; she was inclined to be jealous at first, suspecting a rival in her, but I quieted her fears easily."

"My sister is a good girl, Brinsley Nelson, although she has the hot blood of her race in her veins. Beware that you deal justly by her, or it may make trouble."

"Tush; you are as hot-blooded as your sister, my friend. Have I ever shown a desire to break faith with her?"

"No; but you looked at this girl to-day in a way I did not like."

"Do you admire a beautiful piece of statuary when you see it, Coradi? This girl is beautiful, but she is nothing to me except that her father is a man I hate."

"Ah; where did you know him?"

"No matter; but for him I should be a useful member of society, adorning the sphere in which I moved. Coradi, I will so torture the heart of that man that he shall pray for death, and regard it as a mercy when it comes. May the drink I shall raise to his lips give him happiness, that is all! Pshaw; why waste words upon a theme only personal to myself and him. Has Varda come in?"

"No."

"The scoundrel has got into some trouble. That penchant which he has for the property of other people, especially in horse-flesh, will one day bring him to grief. I hope he has not met Jack Fenway and the Rangers, for if he has, doubtless he is swaying in the wind by the end of a lariat. Where is Watson?"

"Gone to Brazos."

"Chamberlain?"

"At Austin, looking after our interests. Our agent there, Manuel Eusebio, is getting weak in the knees and requires a little prompting, I believe."

"All this is well. If we can keep these dogs of Rangers away from us for a while we shall be able to retire upon the profits of the business. Confound this Dunham; how he runs in my head. I wish you would send Yantic to me."

Coradi strode away, and five minutes after a light, active form, scarcely three feet high, came whirling out of the arch of the temple, turning innumerable summersets, and ending by walking on his hands up to the feet of Nelson, who caught him by the heels and pulled him down. But he bounded up again, apparently without touching the earth, and uttered an elderly scream of laughter, when Nelson gave him a cuff that sent him rolling over and over upon the earth, when he again rose upon his hands, wheeling and turning in fantastic circles, all the time uttering piercing yells of laughter, while his master regarded him with a grim smile.

"Here, you young devil, bring your feet down and listen to me, or I will cut your ears off close to your head."

"Yes, master, yes," screamed the creature, springing lightly to his feet by the muscular effort of his powerful arms. "Here I be."

A strange creature indeed; black as ebony, a connecting link, in appearance at least, between an ape and a man; a bulky body set upon short, stout legs, with a head of more than masculine size, and arms so long, that as he walked, the

extended fingers touched his ankles. His face was very dark, covered with a short, bristling beard, and his black hair was rough and shaggy, tossing in wild confusion upon his shoulders. The eyes were set deeply in his head, so deeply indeed, that they were scarcely distinguishable behind his bristling eyebrows. His dress was as fantastic as his body, being a red shirt, belted at the waist, heavy horseman's boots, a huge sombrero, with an eagle-feather stuck in the band, and a pair of leather riding-breeches. This strange creature danced wildly to and fro before his master, restless as the sea, his small twinkling orbs roving about him continually.

"Keep still, you rascal; keep still. Are you awake, Yantic; is your brain clear?"

"Clear as a bell, master."

"Do you know a settler by the Colorado, one Arthur Dunham by name?"

"Know him? yes. What you do with Arthur Dunham, master?"

"Never mind that; you can find the place easily?"

"Find it? find any place in Texas. Ha! ha! ha! Yantic knows them all, and they know Yantic."

"Very good. You saw the lady who came in with me to-day?"

"Yes; going to send Zillah away, master?"

"Pshaw; who set you to talking, you black imp! I want you to carry a letter to Arthur Dunham from this lady. All you have to do is to ride up, deliver the letter, and be off again at full speed. Take care they don't catch you."

"Catch me! catch Yantic on his white horse, Roarer! Ha! ha! ha! hoo! hoo! hoo! That's good! You know there ain't a horse in Texas that kin catch Roarer, with me on his back. You know it, master!"

"I am not afraid that they will catch you, but you must look out for Fighting Jack, if he is there."

"I'll do it. Hoo! Show me this letter; give me this letter, quick."

Nelson told him to remain where he was while he went for the letter. He obeyed, and during the absence of his master, relieved his mind by walking on his hands, standing on his head, and turning innumerable summersets and cartwheels. Half an hour after he was riding away from the retreat, mounted on a long-limbed white horse, yelling as he went, like a veritable fiend.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE AGAINST SEVEN.

It might well be supposed that there was terrible dread in the home of Mabel, as the day wore on and she did not return. Toward evening Jack Fenway came back with his party, bringing with them three of the stolen horses, but the mare with the blaze on her shoulder was not among them. There was a certain fixed, intent look upon the faces of the band which was awful, and told, as nothing else would, that they had been in the presence of death.

"You have not seen Mabel, boys?" said Dunham, as they rode up.

"Seen her? no. Ain't she hyar?"

"She rode out soon after you did, and has not yet returned."

Jack Fenway leaped upright in his saddle with a cry of surprise.

"You ain't sent her out on the prahary to-day, square? don't say you have."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Comanches are on the trail, and in a week thar will be scalping and fighting all along the border."

"Did you see them?" said Dunham, in an awe-struck voice.

"See 'em? no. I kain't say I see 'em, but I see the'r sign, and that's enuff for me—a band of nigh a hundred, mounted warriors of course, making a straight trail acrost kentry in the d'rection of the Big Chaparral."

"Where is the Big Chaparral?"

Jack silently pointed toward the north-east.

"Thank God! Mabel did not go in that direction."

"Which way, then?"

"She took about the same course that you did."

"Hi, Ned Buttrick, come this way," cried Jack.

One of the Rangers rode out, a small-framed but wiry athlete, with a keen, knowing eye.

"You seen sign under the trees whar we parted with the hoss-thief, you sed. Would you kalkelate it was a man or a woman?"

"Think it were a woman. Whoever it war, the hoss bolted when he see what you know, and went off at a gallop toward the ridges."

"Ha! think he was running away?"

"He was going in jumps, and I don't deceive you. I picked up this yer jest whar he bolted."

He put his hand into a pocket of his hunting shirt, and brought out a large blue button, such as is used in trimming a riding habit. Mrs. Dunham snatched it from his hand, and looked at it closely.

"This is from my darling's habit. Oh, husband, her horse has run away with her, and perhaps she lies helpless on the prairie, a prey to the terrible wolves! Father in Heaven, can I bear this?"

"Thar, thar, old lady, cheer up," said Jack, kindly. "Don't take on *thet ar* way; don't! You rile up my feelings powerful when you do it. Thar ain't a man in this party—and if thar *should* be sech a slink, I want to hear from the mean skunk immediate—who won't resk his ha'r to find pretty Mabel and bring her back safe to you. Speak out, you fellers."

"Lead us, lead us!" cried the Rangers. "We don't back down on that, Fighting Jack."

"That's right; that's human. Now you go back into the house, Miss Dunham, and you keep cool. Trust to old Jack, fur he is a prahary chicken, he is! I'll find her ef so be she is to be found."

"I must go with you," cried Dunham. "Do you think I would stay here, and Mabel in danger?"

"Git yer hoss then, mighty sudden. We ain't got no time to waste, fur we've got to ride to the big tree to find the sign."

Dunham darted into the house for his rifle and pistols, and Jack shouted to a stockman to bring the horse, and by the time the father appeared, fully armed, at the door, the Mexican brought the horse, and stood holding him by the bridle. They dashed away at a rattling pace, although the horses were very tired, and a two hours' hard riding brought them to the tree where the hideous corpse of the man who had frightened Mabel's horse still swung in the passing breeze.

"Who is that?" cried Dunham, with a horrified look.

"That's a hoss-thief, boss," replied Jack, coolly. "I calculate he won't steal no more hosses. Now don't waste any feeling on him, square, fur the bloody villain deserved hanging years ago. Why, man, that's Barney, the Butcher, though that ain't his real name. He was a Mexican, called Varna, the meanest critter that ever went on two legs. Why, he's killed more men than he's got fingers and toes, and he won't kill no more; he ain't on it. Hunt for sign, boys."

The Rangers scattered about the plain, and were not long in finding the trail of Selim, for the hoofmarks were deeply imprinted upon the soft soil. They rode on at a slow trot, Jim Buttrick in advance, with his eyes upon the trail. After half an hour's ride he paused and held up his hand, and the band were quickly grouped about him.

"What now, Jim?" said Jack.

"Indian sign; footman; fresh," said Jim, in his sententious manner.

The Rangers looked at the spot pointed out, and all seemed to read the earth like an open book.

"Tis so, by gracious!" said Jack, leaping out of the saddle and looking closely at the earth. "A Comanche, and a big 'un at that, and on foot. What does the red thief mean by that?"

"I can see nothing," said Dunham, in a surprised tone.

"You don't know Injin sign, you don't, square," said Jack. "Never you mind; it's here, as plain as day, jest as I said it were, and tells me that a big Injin of the Comanche nation passed here on foot half an hour before the hoss did, making for the chaparral. Mount, boys, and follow sign."

Those who had left their saddles bounded up again, and again they followed the trail. Dunham was in despair, but he had unbounded faith in the prairie craft of Fighting Jack, and left all to him. Before long night came on, and it was impossible to follow the trail longer, so, in spite of the protestations of Dunham, they dismounted, tethered their horses, and made a hasty meal upon such cold meat and bread as they had in their saddle-bags, and then, after posting guards upon the different rolls of the prairie about them, lay down upon the short grass for a rest.

"Why must we stop, Jack?" pleaded Dunham. "Let us press on and save my daughter."

"Look yer, square, what's the use of tearing happy-go-lucky over the prahary in the dark? We kaint see the sign, so it's no use to talk."

"I suppose you are right," groaned the unhappy father, "but think of the agony her poor

mother endures at the thought of the great danger."

"Look yer, square, I do think of that. I'm thinking of it all the time, and yit I don't see no way to help it. Hev patience, and when we kin see the trail we will foller agin."

"I will try to be patient."

"Here, take my blanket and lay down. I don't want no blanket myself, bless you. It's a mighty useless thing to me, but I carry it 'cause all the boys do. Try and git a little rest, while I ride out and take a look at the guards."

"Let me go with you. It will serve to pass away the time."

"Yes, if you won't keep bumbling away at me to do what I kaint do, and that is, foller a blind trail by night."

"I agree to that."

They rode out together and visited each of the guards, who reported all right. Each man was sitting on his horse behind the ridge, just far enough elevated above the crest of the ridge to have a command of the prairie which he was set to watch. The moon rose, clear and bright in the blue sky, and they sat silent looking across the great plain, too much moved by the solemn scene to break the silence for some time.

"Now do you wonder that I love the prairie?" said Fighting Jack, making a sweeping gesture with his strong right hand. "Thar it lays; with the moonlight shining on the grass, the level plain of Texas. The Great Master never give a better kentry to man to live in, and I'm ashamed that our love for fighting and bloodshed sometimes turns it to a hell. But whar the painted reptiles and the hoss-thieves be, thar is divltry. Ha! look thar, and keep silent for your lives."

About half a mile away a spur of the ridge came down to meet the prairie, and from behind this a horseman at full gallop bounded suddenly into the light, while behind him rose a series of demoniac cries, such as Dunham had never heard before, and one shadowy horseman after another shot out from behind the ridge until they saw seven men in pursuit of one. Even at that distance the eagle eye of Jack Fenway saw that the foremost rider was a white man, and his pursuers Indians, with their long lances pressed against their thighs. The foremost man was a bold rider, and now and then they saw him look over his shoulder at his pursuers, evidently calculating his distance. The Indians were strung out upon the plain behind him, according to the power of their horses, but the first was so close upon his haunches that scarcely two spear-lengths intervened.

"He'll git his ha'r raised," muttered Jack. "Lord, I'd like to help him, and I would, if I was sure he was game to stay and help us."

That part of it was soon decided. The leading Indian had the better horse of the two, and was gaining inch by inch as they thundered on, and his long lance was lifted ready for the blow. At this moment, without in the least slackening his pace, the white man turned in his saddle with his arm extended. Then came the crack of the pistol, and the Indian fell lifeless to the earth, while his horse careered wildly over the plain.

"Rubbed out, by gracious," muttered Jack. "Here, Ned, let's go down and look into this matter. Whistle for Jim Buttrick, for we orter have three."

"I'll go with you," said Dunham.

"I wouldn't ef I was you," said Jack. "You ain't fit Injuns afore."

"Never mind that; call no more men, but ride on. Perhaps that man has a mother who is weeping for him to-night; who knows?"

"Plucky, the square is," said Jack. "Come along, Ned, and keep yer shooters handy."

By this time two more of the Indians were closing in upon the white man, while the others were making a slight circuit, to close in on him from both sides. They saw him loading the pistols he had fired, even as he rode, a thing which no man except the most practiced horseman could do. But this necessarily retarded his course, and the Indians gained upon him rapidly, although he took it all coolly, pressing the cap hard down upon the tube before he attempted to use the pistol. He fired at last, just as the grim savage with a demoniac yell, thrust at his back with the lance. Nothing saved the white man from being impaled upon the sharp point of the lance but a dexterous twist of the body, while at the same moment the pistol exploded, and the savage rolled off his saddle with that grin of malice frozen on his face. The second was so close that it seemed as if the white man could not avoid the lance, and he lunged out fiercely, and Jack, riding down at a break-neck pace, saw the white man's saddle empty, and thought he had gone down, but the next

moment he saw him with his hand upon the dangling rein of the Indian's horse, too close to allow the use of the lance. There was a quick blow, a wild yell, and the white man appeared in the saddle, with the Indian's lance in his hand!

"Hi, stranger!" roared Jack. "This way; hyar's company."

The white man looked in the direction of the voice, and uttered a cheer of triumph, and the next moment they saw him wheel his horse and ride straight at the first Indian he could see, with his lance-butt pressed hard against his stirrup.

"The devil is mad," hissed Fenway. "But, oh, mighty, kaint he fight!"

He pulled up and sighted an Indian who was next to the one against whom the hunted man directed his lance. Jack Fenway knew how to shoot, and a clock could not have ticked twice from the time when the butt pressed against his shoulder to the flash of the piece. They saw the Indian throw up his arms and sink forward on his horse's mane, just as his companion shot out of the saddle with the force of a catapult, literally forced out by the lance in the nervous hand of the man they had followed almost unto death. The other two Indians saw that help had come, and turned to fly, but Ned dropped one by a long shot, and of the seven who had followed the rescued white man, only one escaped to tell the tale. Dunham fired at him ineffectually, and he disappeared behind the ridge, while the white men rode up to meet each other, as coolly as though nothing had happened.

"How are you, stranger?" said Jack. "Hope you are mighty well."

"All right!" said the stranger, coolly. "Glad you happened along, boys, for I really don't know how it would have come out if you had not shot that fellow. I rather think he would have speared me while I was engaged with this last one."

"You are a cool card, stranger," said Jack. "Extend your fin, ef so be you ain't ashamed to shake hands with an old ranger."

"Not a bit of it, old man," said the other, frankly. "There's my hand, and I'll be glad to know your name."

"I'm Jack Fenway of the Brazos—Fighting Jack they call me sometimes. Must be you hev heard of me?"

"I have, a hundred times, and am proud to take you by the hand. May I ask the names of the other gentlemen?"

"Now see hyar, thar's only one gentleman in our party, and that's the square here, and you mount 'n' knowed it by seeing how handy he missed his man. That other bruiser is Ned Ames, my right bower on a scout. You had a nasty time, jest now."

"Rather. These fellows broke into my camp an hour ago, killed the two men who were with me, and tried to do the same thing by me."

"We seen you come tearing out from behind the ridge, and wanted to take a hand in, but you didn't leave us much to do."

"Well, I had my work cut out for me, and no time to waste in doing it. Have you a camp hereabout?"

"Just over the swell."

"Then with your permission I will camp with you to-night."

"You're welcome; Ned, git down and raise this ha'r and bring it along. You'd better be spry, for I hear the boys a-coming and they may want a hand in."

"Come on, sir," said Dunham, in a whisper to the stranger. "They are enemies and villains, but I cannot bear this mutilation of the dead."

"You must get over that prejudice, if you live long in Texas. I am an Indian-fighter of long standing, but I never mutilate a man who is dead; but, for all that, the atrocities of these Comanche fiends have made the Rangers revengeful, and besides, there is a premium upon the scalps of warriors. You cannot conquer Comanches with birchen rods."

They rode back together, and as they went Dunham studied his companion. A tall, muscular, strongly-framed young man, with a face having too many angles for beauty, but with a lofty, gallant bearing; a man to live and die with; a Saul among his fellows. Half-way up the slope they met the Rangers coming down at full gallop, their bridles swinging loose, their rifles ready, and their faces flushed with the ardor of battle.

"Turn back, boys," said the stranger. "It's all right, and the Comanches are gone under."

The Rangers, hearing that quiet but commanding voice, slung their rifles, and fell in behind the speaker, and rode back to camp with-

out a word. Ten minutes after Fighting Jack and Ned came in, and the first rode close to the stranger, who had picketed his horse and was lying on the grass, and looked closely into his face.

"Mad Tom, by the living hokies! Boys, here's your leader; give him three cheers for the honor of Texas."

The men burst into a stentorian cheering and crowded about the bold stranger to take him by the hand, mad with joy.

CHAPTER V.

THE RANGERS' GATHERING.

THOMAS WESTERN, better known as Mad Tom, from his chivalrous and almost insane daring when in battle, was a man prominent in the early history of Texas, and one of the most active leaders of Rangers known since Texas shook off the Mexican yoke, and set up the "Lone Star" banner. A man yet young, frank and generous, possessing a muscular frame and a stout heart, with the power of leading those who followed him wherever he might choose to go, it is no wonder that he gained the hearts of the bold riders of the plains. When there was dangerous service to be done, requiring more than usual pluck and ability, Mad Tom Western was sure to be sent for. He had the civil power of sheriff as well as his command in the Rangers, and this gave what he did the color of civil law. The Comanche, the Apache and Navajo knew and feared him. Wherever his towering form was seen in some desperate struggle on the plains, the Indians went down like men of straw. Fighting Jack, knowing that a time of great peril was coming to that section over which he had control, had sent for Western, knowing that he would come, and he had ridden up from Austin with only two men, and had been set upon in the chaparral in the night, and only escaped in the way we have noted.

"By Jehosaphat!" roared Jack. "I didn't know you, Tom; I don't know why."

"I kept my face away from you as much as possible," said Western, "for I wanted to see how long I could talk before you would find me out."

"If I wasn't a born fool I'd 'a' knowed that only one man in Texas could fight Ingins that way," growled Jack, sulkily. "Come this way; I want to tell you why we are out to-night."

He led the leader apart, and communicated in a low voice the object of their search, and pointed out Dunham as the father of the lost girl. Western became immediately attentive, for no knight of the old days had so great a respect, or more chivalrous feelings in regard to woman, than this man of the West. His deep gray eyes kindled, and were fixed intently upon the face of the Ranger as he told the story, and when it was done he pledged himself to do all in his power to aid them in recovering Mabel Dunham. The vivid description of her beauty, too, had its effect upon him, and the young man found himself dreaming, from time to time, whether she would receive him as she did the other Rangers.

"We must do what we can, Jack," he said; "and yet, I don't like to stay here to-night. Those few Indians were not alone, in my opinion, but are a part of some great band congregated for a raid upon the border. Have you sent word for the rest of the fellows to turn out?"

"Yes; they are ordered to meet at Dunham's to-morrow night, and to be ready to move at a moment's warning."

"How many can you turn out?"

"Fifty-seven, big and little, old and young."

"I know your men of the Colorado, old Jack, and they are game to the bottom, and will fight until the teeth meet in the flesh. Let's double our guards and do as well as we can; but I'm a little afraid the Comanches will find us before morning."

They did not, however. Either the Indians who had attacked Western's party had wandered a great distance from their main party, or some accident had happened to the single man who had escaped, for the night passed without further alarm. At early morning the Rangers again started upon the trail, and about ten o'clock reached the place where the Comanche warrior had seized Mabel. The keen eyes of the scouts saw the evidences of the struggle, and every cheek turned white, and they cast looks of silent sorrow at the unfortunate father who sat in his saddle, nervously awaiting their verdict.

"Why don't you speak?" he half-screamed.

"Why do you look at me in that way?"

"You tell him," muttered Jack, in the ear of Tom Western.

"I tell him! I'll see you all— It's your business, Jack Fenway."

"I don't see it that way, but it must be done. Square, I'm right sorry to say it, but the sign shows that pretty Mabel met a Comanche hyar, and I'm afraid he took her."

The father uttered an agonizing cry, and dropped his face into his open palms, and the Rangers sat mute, looking at him without the power of giving relief.

They knew how he loved his daughter, and none knew better than they how merciless the Comanches are to their captives, for some of them had known what it was to see the roof-tree low, and to find the mangled forms of dear friends or relatives lying among the charred and blackened remains of a once happy home.

"Cheer up, cheer up," said Jack, with a rude attempt at consolation. "We ain't give her up yet, and we'll find her, ef so be she's anywhar above ground. Look around you, boys, and see what you kin find."

They were about to obey the summons when a cry arose that the Comanches were coming. They looked out upon the plain and saw a great band of Indians, fully a hundred in number, coming down at the full speed of their wild horses. They came on in single file, at the full stretch of their horses, the shield upon the left arm, rifles slung upon the same side, and the right hand grasping the weapon *par excellence* of the prairie Indian—the lance. That they were a war-party was plainly to be seen, for not an Indian woman could be seen in the band. Looking at them from the slope, Dunham no longer wondered that the cowardly Mexicans could not stand before them; but his inspection was cut short by Western.

"We must get out of this, Jack," he said. "With only thirteen men, it is foolhardy even for me to stand against that party unless forced to it, and you all know I take long odds sometimes. Get back out of sight, for I don't think they see us yet."

"Not they, or the red demons would yell enough to wake the dead from their graves."

"Fall back, then, and let your guide show us the way across the ridge to the level as soon as possible."

Buttrick rode to the front, and Dunham, with a despairing look, followed slowly. Western looked and shook his head, his fine face clouded, and Jack Fenway nodded gravely.

"He knows what Texas is now, poor fellow," thought Western. "I hope the poor girl has escaped, but I don't like it in the least."

They rode away at a rapid pace, Buttrick leading the way like a man who understood his ground. They crossed a point in the chaparral, descended a sterile slope, and reached the bottom of a gully which ran through the ridge, just wide enough for a single horseman to pass through. Passing through this gully, they struck the bed of a small stream, and Buttrick led the way into the water, and they waded in the bed of the stream for half an hour, sometimes up to their saddles in water, and at others in such shallows that but for the sand the water would not have covered the fetlocks. Then they left the course of the stream, and turning abruptly to the left, entered a second gully, something like the first they had passed through, and rode over a rocky path, upon which the unshod horses made no impression, and came suddenly out upon the plain, five miles below the spot where they had seen the Indians. Moreover, a broad strip of forest nearly four miles long intervened between them and their Indian foes, and Western looked approvingly at Buttrick.

"You are a guide, my man," he said. "It's a pleasure to follow your lead."

"I know the kentry," grunted the guide. "Ret yer life on that!"

Western now turned to Dunham, the sadness upon whose face was deepening, and spoke to him for the first time since the appearance of the Indians.

"You can bear adversity, sir," he said.

"You made no opposition when we were forced to leave the trail of the Indians and your daughter, because you saw that the great war-party was too much for us. Now, in return for that, there is my hand, and I give you my promise not to turn back, when once at the head of your Rangers, until it is decided that nothing can save your daughter; and if she is lost, I will take such vengeance that the whole Comanche nation shall bewail the hour when they did her an injury."

"You are a brave man and comfort me; but her mother—her poor mother!" cried Dunham.

"She must bear the loss as bravely as she can. Look at me; I was the youngest of a

family of seven brothers, all brave men and lovers of Texas. Where are they now? Ask the Comanches, who cut them off in one night. I had a sister, who killed herself rather than fall into their hands. My gray-haired father lay dead across the threshold he had defended to the last, and I alone remain. I am not likely then to forget my wrongs or spare an Indian. I never have done it since that hour. I never shall while they harry the border, and your wrongs shall be a new incentive to revenge. I have never before said as much as this to any man, and should not now, except to show you that I am a man not likely to turn my back while this Comanche band remains upon the plains. Ride on, Buttrick, and take as straight a course as you can toward Mr. Dunham's."

"They kain't git at us now, even ef they was to see us," said Buttrick. They'd hev to go round the wood, for thar's a quicksand through it they couldn't cross, and by the time they got down we'd be ten miles away."

"All right; go on."

The band set out moodily upon their return, and toward sunset rode up to Dunham's ranch. Mrs. Dunham was waiting for them, and her heart suuk as she saw them come back without Mabel, and her husband's face showed her that they had been unsuccessful. The Rangers did not come up to the house, but went into camp outside, and Dunham went alone into his desolated home. The secret of that meeting between husband and wife no one knows, and let it be hidden. In the end her strong, true, earnest nature triumphed, and she was ready to bear as bravely as she might, the burden which had been laid upon her. Dunham gave orders for the killing of a beef for the Rangers, and it was needed, for all through the night additions were made to their numbers, men who came singly and in groups, until the morning showed sixty well-armed Rangers camped in the space outside the cabin, ready for battle.

CHAPTER VI.

A FALSE RANGER.

WESTERN had been busy through the night, and scouts had been sent out in various directions to pick up news of the coming of the Indians, who were expected to strike at some of the outlying stations, perhaps at Dunham's first of all. The stock-men and drivers were armed, but most of them were Mexicans, who, although loud in protestations of the fearful deeds of valor they would do, were not to be depended on in a fight. Four picked men from the Rangers were therefore selected to guard the station from any sudden attack, and boats were ready upon the river behind the house to take the people to the other bank, in case they should be attacked by overwhelming numbers, as might be the case.

The scouts came in one by one, and reported no Indians to be seen, but Western was too well versed in the Indian character to suppose that they would retreat without striking a blow, if, as he believed, they were led by Captain Wautena, the most famous Comanche chief of his day.

"Very well, boys. If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the mountain. Fall in, you screamers! Look to your ammunition, and see that your saddles are all right, for some of your stirrups will be tried before you get back from this raid."

So they mounted and rode away in search of the Indian band, and Dunham went with them. Three miles from the cabin they were startled by piercing yells, and thought the Indians were upon them, and each laid a hand upon his rifle, but dropped it with a laugh as they saw the figure of Yantic, the deformed follower of Brinsley Nelson, coming down at a mad gallop, performing the most surprising antics. Now he would leap upright in his saddle, swaying his body and arms in a fantastic manner, and performing feats which no circus performer ever equaled. Then he would grasp the saddle with both hands, flourishing his short legs in the air, stand upon his head, lie at length upon the horse's back, spring to the earth, still clinging to the saddle and leap lightly up again, yelling all the while in the most frantic manner.

"Halt," shouted Western. "Come in here, you young imp."

Yantic replied by a defiant cry, and only consented to cease his antics when a rifle was brought to bear upon him, and he came riding up to the Rangers, gravely standing on his head, and beaming at them complacently from his keen gray eyes. Reaching the band, he threw himself over his horse's head, bounding up like a ball when he touched the ground, and behold him seated, gravely, upon Western's horse, in front of the saddle looking up at him!

"How are you?" he said. "Ha! ha! ha! hoo! I'm Yantic."

"I should say you were," said Western, plucking him from his perch and dropping him upon the ground. "What have you got to say to me?"

"Don't want you; want Mister Dunham. Yah! Hoo! hoo! hoo! I see him."

"Who is this strange creature?" said Dunham. "What does he want with me?"

"I'm Yantic," persisted the creature, flourishing his long arms in the air, and bursting into shouts of elfish laughter. "Yantic the wise, Yantic the beauty, hoo! hoo! I want to talk to you, Mr. Dunham, and I can't do it before all these men. They have no right to listen."

"Ride on in front, gentlemen," said Dunham. "But look you, Master Yantic, or whatever you choose to call yourself," said Western.

"Don't let me have to come back to you, for, as surely as I do, I will have your ears off close to your head."

Yantic only answered by a gesture of derision, and the Rangers touched their horses and rode on for a hundred yards, when they faced about and looked at the pair left upon the prairie.

"Now, sir," said Dunham.

"Now, sir," replied Yantic, mimicking him.

"What do you seek here?"

"Yourself."

"Have you anything to say to me?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Yantic thrust his hand into the breast of his red shirt and drew out a note which he put into the hands of the father, who grasped it eagerly and tore it open. It was from Mabel, and read as follows:

"DEAR FATHER—I have been in deadly peril, but have escaped it, and am now in the hands of friends. I send this by a trusty hand to ease your anxiety, and save my mother from the sorrow she must feel at my supposed loss. Tell her that I am safe and happy, and to-morrow or the next day, at the furthest, I shall be with you again. My friends inform me that there are Indians on the plains, and it may be that they cannot take me home at once, but they assure me that when it is safe I shall be returned to you. I am not at liberty to inform you who my friends are, but they treat me with great kindness. I write in haste, for the messenger who is to carry this letter is waiting and I would not keep my dear mother in suspense for a moment."

"Your affectionate daughter, MABEL."

Dunham uttered a joyful shout and rode toward the band, waving the letter above his head. Yantic followed, standing upright in the saddle, performing his strange feats of equestrianism. The happy father, with tears in his eyes, read the letter to the Rangers, who broke out into stentorian cheering.

"Hyar, you little imp," roared Jack. "Do you want my scalp, say? By Jinks, you kin have it. Hip, hip, hip, hooray! Who's got any money? Hyar's all the dust I've got, and it goes with the hat fur that little chap that brought the letter. Plank your dust, you sinners."

He rode through the company, holding his hat in his hand, and every man put something of value into it. Dunham emptied his pocket-book into it, and Western threw in a handful of gold coin.

"Hold your hat, you little cuss," said Jack. "Boy, I like you; yer a feller after my own heart, and I wish you was in the Rangers, I do. Look hyar; ef you ever want a friend, you come to Jack Fenway, Fighting Jack of the Brazos, and he'll answer the call, my little rooster."

"Yantic don't want the money," said the strange creature, with a suspicious moisture in his eyes. "You are very kind to me, and I thank you."

"Bah! you take the dust, or we'll quarrel, and I know you don't want to quarrel with me. Now, where is the gal?"

Yantic suddenly became mute, and looked at the speaker with a lack-luster eye.

"None of that, Jack," said Western. "You must remember that the lady's letter says that she is not at liberty to tell who her friends are."

Yantic cast a gratified look at the speaker.

"The white lady will come back," he said. "There are Comanches on the plains and no one but Yantic dare come out. Yantic is not afraid of them."

"They'd raise your ha'r, boy; you must look out for them," said Jack.

"Boo! They can't catch Yantic on his white horse Roarer."

"I don't believe they kin," replied Jack, admiringly. "I never see an Injin yit that could do what you kin on hossback, anyway. You said thar was Injins on the plain. How many?"

"A hundred."

"Did you count them?"

"Yah! They chased Yantic, but they gave it up. The chief caught Misses Dunham yesterday, but she got away and ran into the chaparral from him. Hoo! He couldn't catch her."

"By jingo, I thought so," said Jack. "Who is the Comanche chief?"

"Captain Waubena."

"Ha! then we must look out, for the big thief is smart, thar's no denying. He kin fight, too, and knows how to lead men. Could you guide us to the place where you saw him last?"

"Must go back; I promised the master I would, and he'd give it to me if I'm behind the time."

"I suppose you must go then," said Jack. "Whar did you see the Indians last?"

The deformed man or boy pointed out upon the prairie toward the west.

"Over there," he said. "There's a man hanging to a tree with his tongue out. Hoo! How Yantic laughed at him."

"Go back to the place from which you came, boy," said Dunham, "and tell my daughter that I have received her letter and am happy, and will ride at once to tell her mother of her safety. Tell her to keep quiet where she is, for the Comanches are on the war-path."

The boy shook his elf locks wildly, waved his hand in token of farewell, and shot off across the prairie at a pace which astonished the Rangers, who had not dreamed that the gray horse was capable of such speed. Jack looked after him, laughing:

"I don't wonder the Comanches couldn't catch him," he said. "I never see a horse go like that in all my life. I s'pose you are going back to tell your wife, square?"

"Immediately; she will be in agony until we return."

"You must go, Mr. Dunham, but be careful of yourself and look out for the Indians," said Western. "We must go on, and try to force a battle with Captain Waubena, although I doubt he is too cautious to meet us."

Dunham bade them good-by, and rode away toward his home at full speed, while the Rangers disappeared over the swell in the opposite direction. They knew the enemy they had to deal with, but what ranger did not consider himself equal to any two Indians who ever crossed the prairie?

"What do you think of that boy, Jack?" said Western, as they rode side by side.

"I don't know what to think, Tom. It seems to me that he knows too much for such a looking specimen as he is."

"The young rascal knows enough, but does it not seem strange to you that these men refuse to allow Miss Dunham to speak of them?"

"Tis odd; but they've got good reasons, probably."

"Not a doubt of it; but I dislike mysteries in our part of the country. I hope they may bring the lady back to her mother."

"That boy will stand by her," said Jack. "I tell you he ain't got a bad heart, and the tears was in his eyes when he see how glad we was to find where she was. I've got a good deal of faith in the little chap, though he wouldn't tell us who he was. You, Tom Buttrick, ride out and scout a little. I'd like to bring this cussid Waubena to a fight."

Buttrick disappeared over the swell of the prairie, and the Rangers rode slowly after. Ten minutes passed, and he came riding back to say that the coast was clear for miles, and not an Indian in sight, but that he could see Yantic holding a straight course for the chaparral.

"Waubena is in the chaparral," said Jack.

"You bet on it he means something more than a mere dash, or it would be over by now. Ef thar's any thing I do hate, it's cuteness in an Injin, and Waubena's got it, and no mistake."

"We had better ride down to the three trees and bury that body I've heard spoken of, and then see if we can not rouse the Indians out of the chaparral, if they are in it."

They rode on to the three trees and took down the ghastly form of Varda, the horse-thief, and, digging a trench in the soft earth of the prairie, threw the body in and covered it completely. There was little sympathy wasted over the dead Mexican, for they knew him to be a man utterly wicked, who deserved his fate. Their work done, the two leaders had a consultation, and at the end of it, four scouts rode away upon divergent paths, and Western and Jack rode off together, leaving the greater portion of the band camped upon the prairie, waiting orders.

The two leaders rode rapidly along the broad trail left by the Indians, when they last passed over it, talking to each other in low tones, and

after a long ride reached the Big Chaparral without meeting an enemy, plunged in, and disappeared from the view of any one who had been upon the prairie.

"Got a compass?" said Jack, as they entered. Western nodded in reply, and touched the pocket of his shooting-coat. Both these prairie voyagers knew the danger of being lost in the boundless chaparral too well to be caught in it without a guide.

"Let's wait hyar, then," said Jack. "I may be wrong, Tom, I hope I be, but I don't like the ways of our friend Dick Dempsey. That's why I sent him with the scouts, and by jingo here he comes alone."

Looking out upon the prairie, they saw Dempsey approaching at a slinging trot. As he came near, they could see that his dark face was lighted up by a savage grin, and now and then his knife-hand dropped upon the hilt in an angry manner. They sat silent as statues upon their trained horses as he broke into the chaparral not fifty yards from them, and rode on with the air of a man who knew where he was going.

"He ain't scouting fur the Injins, Tom," said Jack. "What is he arter, then?"

"That we must find out. Let us strike his trail and follow him at once."

Dempsey rode on swiftly across the chaparral, taking the paths with the ease of one who had been there before. After half an hour's ride he paused in his rapid course, and raising a whistle to his lips, blew a shrill call. It was answered immediately from a distance, and the call was made and repeated from time to time, when a hasty step was heard, and the man called Brinsley Nelson appeared on foot.

"Ha, old fellow," he said, "very glad to see you. How do you like your life as a Texan Ranger?"

"It's a cursed life," replied the other, sullenly, "and you have no right to keep me at it. Now I like fighting well enough, but these fellows suit me too well. If they can't find any Indians or horse-thieves to hang or shoot, they get up a fight among themselves."

"That is the nature of the strange animal known as the Texan Ranger," said Nelson, laughing. "Have they hung anybody lately to your knowledge?"

"Yes; they hung Varda yesterday. The fool was down the river at a ranch, and nothing would do him but to steal some horses from an old major. Of course Jack Fenway got out the Rangers and followed him, and—you know the rest."

"Did he blab?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll say this in his favor: scoundrel as he was, he died with his teeth set."

"Exit Emanuel Varda," said Nelson, quietly.

"Doubtless you would speak in that way of me, if I got into trouble."

"No, Dempsey, not I. The fact is, our deceased friend, Varda, had too clumsy a hand for our work, and it is better for us, all things considered, that he has made his bow and retired. There are both worse and better men than Varda in this naughty world of ours, but he has served his purpose and is gone. The Rangers are out again, Yantic tells me."

"Did that venomous heap of bones tell you that the Rangers gave him a hatful of money for bringing that letter?"

"Yes; they rewarded him well for it, and thanks to the nice sense of honor of our friend Tom Western, did not ask him any awkward questions. Though, for the matter of that, I doubt if they could have made much out of Yantic. He can assume the most imbecile look upon occasions I ever saw."

"I came here to speak of this girl you have taken, Captain Nelson; I want you to keep her here awhile."

"Why so?"

"Because I can make better terms with her here than at home. I love the little coquette, and she puts me aside in her supercilious manner until I am half mad."

Nelson ran his eyes laughingly up and down the person of the speaker. His look of scornful surprise was simply maddening to a man of Dempsey's temperament, and his hand dropped to the hilt of his knife.

"Don't provoke me, Brinsley Nelson. You ought to know better than that."

"My dear fellow, you surely do not mean what you say. This lady whom we have saved from the dangers of the chaparral is a lady, both by birth and education, a refined woman in every respect, and you, to say the least, have neglected those arts which beautify and adorn the creature man."

"What is that to you?" shrieked the man,

savagely. "I'll have her, and you'd better not stand in my way."

"My dear fellow, I don't stand in your way. If the lady's inclinations do not—"

"You know well enough I can't git her by fair means. Will you keep her here and give me a chance?"

"Keep her here? You know as well as I do that it is impossible. The lady goes back to her father this very day, if the coast is clear, for the men are grumbling already. Come; I'll tell you what I will do. Where are the Rangers?"

"Camped by the three trees, where we hung Varda."

"Have they buried him?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall have all the *eclat* of returning her to her parents. I will go with you and we will take her to the Rangers and give her up."

"That is something," said the young man, sullenly. "Do you mean to face the Rangers yourself?"

"Certainly."

"But, mad Tom Western is there."

"Tom Western is an intimate friend of mine, and you will see that he will be glad to see me. Come to the camp and we will find the lady, and seek the Rangers at once."

CHAPTER VII.

ZILLAH.

MABEL, after sending her letter to her father, began to make acquaintance with Zillah, and found her intelligence more than commensurate with her beauty.

"I am a Mexican girl," said Zillah, in answer to Mabel's queries, "as you have doubtless guessed. I lived in the city of Mexico, but my father had a hacienda outside the walls of the city. My father was prominent in the councils of the ruling house, and rich; but you know what Mexico is. In one night, as if by an earthquake, the power of the government was overthrown, the President an exile, and my father slain upon the very threshold of his dwelling, which, to the last, he had bravely defended. My brother and myself, young children, were driven out, homeless and friendless. To the last we will cling together, and if need be die together when the end comes. Our motto is, faithful until death."

"And what did you do?"

"Ask any homeless waif that is suddenly deprived of a country and a home. We did what we could, and by the aid of some jewels which my brother, a bright boy, succeeded in saving, we did very well for a time, struggling on against hope. I took the garb of a boy, and as such made voyages as a cabin-boy in the same ship in which my brother was a hand before the mast. Through all I have kept myself a pure woman, for the honor of our ancient house is very dear to me, and I hope to see the time when it shall rise from the dust and again become a power in the land, as it has been."

"And who is this Brinsley Nelson who has given me shelter?"

A roscate flush stole up into the rich complexion of Zillah.

"Ask me nothing of him. Whatever he may have been to others, to me he has been nothing but a true friend. He gave us a shelter and a home when all others forsook us, and aided us in the great design for which we labor."

"Little girl, your blushing cheek betrays you. Brinsley Nelson is something more to you than a kind friend."

Zillah hid her face on the neck of the speaker and made no reply.

"May he be deserving of the love of such a heart as yours, my sweet girl," said Mabel. "As for me, I have no lover."

"Not one?"

"Pshaw. There are half a dozen bordermen who would love me if I would allow it, but they are not of my kind."

"Did you never see a man whom you could love?"

"One only," said Mabel, softly; "but I never saw him except once, and shall never see him again."

"Will you tell me where it was?"

"In New Orleans, two years ago. There was a fire in the building in which we were stopping at the time, and I slept heavily, tired out. When I awoke, a cloud of smoke was in the room, and I could hear the crackling of the flames beneath me. Staggering to my feet, in dread of approaching death, I looked out at the window, and a passing breeze fanned aside the smoke, and showed me a wild scene. The street below was in wild confusion. Helmeted fire

warriors were hard at work, the rattle of the brakes, the hoarse notes of the fire trumpet, and the dash of water, coupled with the roaring flames, combined to make a grand and imposing scene. As I stood there my father saw me, and raised his hands to me, calling on my name. Then a universal shout of horror rose from beneath me, and no one dared to enter. I saw two or three firemen run in, but they emerged immediately, their hands covering their blistered faces.

"Bring that long ladder," cried a commanding voice. The room in which I was in the third story, and when the ladder was put up, I found to my horror that it did not reach the window within ten feet. An active figure ran up the ladder like a cat, and I looked into his face and read something in his eyes which I never saw in man's eyes before, a determination to succeed or die. He paused on the last round but one, and took a coil of rope from his shoulder.

"I am going to throw the end of this rope to you," he said, hurriedly. "Can you find any thing to fasten it to?"

"Yes," I said.

"Keep steady; tie it tightly, and all will be well, for I have come to save you."

He threw up the rope and I caught it, and groping through that fiery oven, tied it fast to the bed-post.

"Is it all right?" he cried.

"I had little voice to answer, but I told him yes, and the next moment he was in the room. A handsome, strong-built young man, with a determined eye, wearing a dress very much like the costume of the Texan Rangers.

"Come here," he said, and I obeyed him without a word. He caught me in his arm and ran to the window, and taking up a shawl, threw it about my body and made me sit upon the window-sill. Then with that powerful arm he lowered me to a fireman who was standing on the ladder below, and he received me and descended carefully, bearing me in his arms. My preserver waited until we were down, though the flames were bursting through the floors of the room in which he stood, and then went out upon the window-sill. Just as his feet touched the ladder the rope, burned through, separated suddenly, and he fell, while a cry of dismay went up from the street, but changed to a joyful outcry, for his hands fastened on a round of the ladder as he fell, and swinging himself round, he struck the ladder and slid quickly to the ground.

"If that rope had broken a moment sooner I should have been hurt," he said, coolly.

"My father overwhelmed him with protestations of regard and gratitude, which he listened to quietly."

"Thank you; it's all right, but my sort of fellows like a spice of danger."

"At least give me your name," my father protested.

"Not here; where shall I find you to-morrow?"

"At the St. Charles. Do not fail to come, for we expect you, and you have saved a life dearer to me than my own."

He bowed and left us, and from that time I have never seen his face. Zillah, that face is always with me, and I would know it anywhere I should see it. Why he did not come to us, I have never known, but we left New Orleans the second day after the fire, and came here. I wish I knew his name, for I would treasure it in my heart, and keep its memory green, even though I may never see him again. For his sake I will wait patiently, hoping that in God's good time I may meet and know him."

"This is love," said Zillah. "You do not know your own heart, dear girl, or you might be sure of that. Ah; that is Nelson's rap; come in."

The door opened, and Brinsley Nelson appeared upon the threshold.

"May I enter?" he said. "You do not know how I pine for society better than this outside."

Zillah nodded brightly, and he entered, took a seat, and began to converse with a fluency peculiarly his own. Mabel felt the charm of his conversation, and yet there was something about it even while she listened intently, which did not please her. Perhaps it was on account of a certain flippancy and dash in his manner, which gave her this unfavorable impression, but he, unconscious of the feeling he caused, talked on for an hour, until it became quite late, when with an apology for taking so much of their time, he bowed and withdrew, and went to an angle of the wall of the temple behind a small cabin, and disappeared. Where he went, it was impossible to say, but an hour after he came out, his face working painfully, and a wild light in his eyes, and unlocking the door of his

cabin, went in and threw himself upon a couch in deep thought, with a paper of cigarettes beside him, which he smoked rapidly, lighting a new one by the ashes of the old, as soon as it began to burn low.

"*Diavolo!*" he hissed at last. "I wish I could get this girl out of my brain, for, by every tie I am bound to Zillah, and ought to be faithful to her, and Coradi will keep me to my promise or have my life. A crisis; how will it end?"

The morning of the next day was spent by the two girls in lounging about the ruined walls, noting the strange emblems engraved upon them, and studying the hieroglyphics about them. About noonday, Nelson came into the place and told Mabel that the time had come to return to her friends.

"Am I to lose you so soon, Mabel?" said Zillah, clasping the hand of her friend. "I have longed for such a friend as you, and now I lose you in the moment when I love you most."

"The parting will not be final, Zillah," said Mabel. "I will see you again, and that soon. I live by the Colorado, thirty miles below, and you must come and see me."

Zillah looked at Nelson and her eyes asked a question, and he answered by an affirmative nod.

"It is better that you should part now, for I am informed that a strong party of Rangers are camped upon the prairie not far from here, and the object of their search is yourself. I have fallen in with one of them by chance, and he will accompany us to the spot."

"I must go, Zillah," said Mabel. "Remember that my mother, who loves me dearly, is waiting and watching for my coming, and has been in great grief on my account."

"Go, go," cried Zillah. "I, also, have lost all kindred except my brother, and know what it is to feel the loss of those we dearly love. I will see you again by some means, and send you messages by my Mercury, Yantic, who is a faithful little fellow, with a good heart in his bosom in spite of his strange form."

Nelson led Mabel from the cabin, where she found two horses ready saddled and waiting for them. With a tender farewell to Zillah, Mabel mounted, and followed Nelson by the tortuous paths which led through the chaparral. They had not gone a hundred yards, however, when Zillah came clattering after them, mounted upon a strong black mustang.

"I must go, Brinsley," she said, in answer to his reproving look. "Do not deny me, for I promise to turn back when we reach the edge of the chaparral."

Nelson made no reply, but rode in front, and the two girls followed, side by side where the path was wide enough, and separating only where the narrow track made it necessary. Zillah rode well, controlling the spirited mustang as only a Mexican woman can, her brown cheek flushed by exercise and her luxuriant hair floating back upon the breeze.

"Your coming has given me new life, Mabel," she said. "I was wishing for something of the kind as a change in my monotonous life, but it never came. How lucky it was that you escaped into the chaparral; but for that I should never have seen you."

"That is true in more senses than one, Zillah. If you had seen that horrible Indian who pursued me you would have taken the same course that I did."

"Not I," cried Zillah. "I would have fought him, and beat him too."

At this moment a face, horribly painted, with a grin of malice imprinted upon it, parted the leaves of a thick clump of bushes and looked at them. They did not notice it, but rode on unconscious of their danger, for the face was that of Captain Waubena, the Comanche chief. He remained as immovable as a statue until they passed, and then stole out like a phantom and followed their trail cautiously, his hand grasping a short rifle, ready for a shot. But, fortunately for them, Dick Dempsey met them at this point, and the chief was too able a warrior to hazard a battle with two such men as the Ranger and Nelson, but kept on the trail.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Dempsey," said Mabel, extending her hand, "and I thank you for coming to my aid."

A delighted flush shot into the dark face of the Ranger as he took the proffered hand.

"You know I'd do any thing for you," he said, eagerly, "if it was to give my life."

She withdrew her hand rather quickly, for she knew that this man, rough and rude as he was, loved her with all the passionate fire of the Irish nature. Zillah parted from them at the edge of the chaparral, and rode back alone

to meet a danger of which they had not dreamed, while Mabel, accompanied by Dempsey and Nelson, crossed the plain toward the Rangers' camp. All the way Dempsey hardly spoke a word, but his dark eyes were constantly fixed upon the beautiful girl. They rode at a rapid pace, for Nelson knew that the Indians were about, and it was with a sigh of relief that he saw the Rangers picketed upon the plain, and lounging about in indolent ease, with that disregard of danger so characteristic of this people. They raised a wild shout as they saw the party, and a score of men ran out to meet them, and Mabel was escorted in a sort of triumphal procession to the camp, laughing at the manner of her reception, but with suspicious drops in her beautiful eyes.

"You are all too kind to me," she said. "Is my father here?"

"No, Miss Mabel; he got your letter and went back to tell your mother that you were safe."

"I am glad she is at ease, then," said Mabel. "You must thank this gentleman for my safety; but for him I might be lying in the chaparral, lost and starving."

Many a rough hand was extended, and Brinsley Nelson found himself very popular with a party, who, if they had known all, would not have been so lavish of their compliments.

CHAPTER VIII.

ZILLAH'S GREAT STRUGGLE.

ZILLAH, after watching the departure of her new friend, turned back toward the ruined temple; but hardly had she gone a hundred feet when there started up before her the apparition of an armed chief, his savage face gleaming with delight. It was Waubena, the Comanche.

"Stop," he said, in broken Spanish, learned from his intercourse with the Mexicans. "A great chief tells you, stay."

"Who are you?" cried Zillah, drawing a pistol. "Back! I am not a child, to be easily taken, and if you move a step, you die."

"Wagh!" cried Waubena. "The white women have all turned warriors. What does Captain Waubena care for a short gun in a weak hand? See, you have the heart of a brave and are fit to go into the lodge of a great chief."

"Beware! My hand is true, and if you advance a single step, you die."

Waubena paused and looked at her threateningly. While he was as brave as a lion, he had a wholesome respect for firearms, and knew that a chance shot might put an end to his campaigning forever.

"Stop, white girl," he said. "What better fate can a woman choose than to be the favorite wife of the King of the Prairie, Waubena. Put up the short gun, and follow the steps of a chief."

Instead of yielding, she pulled the trigger, and without waiting for the effect of the shot, she turned and dashed into the thick bushes on the right. Waubena put his hand to his head with a fiendish snarl, and the next moment darted after her. The effort would have been idle but for an accident, for of course he had little chance of overtaking the fleet mustang. But, as he bounded through the bushes, a stout branch which crossed the path threw her from the saddle, and she lay stunned and dizzy at the feet of Waubena, who uttered a cry of delight as he seized upon her. But, at that moment, he was fiercely assailed by the mustang, who rushed at him with open mouth, the foam dropping from his red tongue and his eyes blazing. Waubena knew what it was to face a maddened horse, and leaped back, suddenly plunging into the bushes out of sight, and the mustang turned back to his prostrate mistress. Twice Waubena endeavored to approach, but as often as he did so the mustang rushed at him with a defiant snort, and the Indian fled, baffled, but furiously angry. After the third attempt he paused, and took his bow from his back, fitting an arrow to the string, and appeared again in the open space. The horse dashed at him, and received the sharp arrow in his broad chest, driven with all the force of the mighty bow. Straight and true it sped, and the black horse, rising upon his hind feet, pawed the air wildly for a moment and fell dead beside the mistress he had so bravely defended. By this time she had regained her feet and stood there, with another pistol in her hand, pale but firm.

"Coward," she cried. "You have killed the faithful beast because he fought for the mistress who had been kind to him, and you deserve to die a dog's death. I am not alone or unprotected, as you shall find to your cost."

A silver whistle hung at her waist, and raising it to her lips, she blew a shrill call, while hold-

ing her weapon ready for him in case he should advance. He started as the shrill note penetrated the forest, and with the shout of a tiger bounded at her. Then he was doomed, for the pistol was leveled straight and true at his broad breast, but the fall had loosened the cap upon the weapon, and it did not explode. Before she could replace it, the iron grasp of Waubena fastened upon her.

"Ha!" he hissed. "Last sun, one white girl escaped; you shall not. Walk the woods."

Zillah struggled desperately, crying aloud for help, and it came. Two men came crashing through the bushes, and seeing that it was useless to attempt to keep his prisoner, Waubena began to feel for his knife. But, before he could draw it, Mad Tom Western was at his side, and they closed in a fierce grapple.

Two men of giant frame, the struggle was terrible. Jack Fenway would have darted in to aid his friend, but he sternly ordered him back, determined to conquer alone, while Zillah, exhausted by the struggle, sunk upon the earth, and watched the battle fixedly. She saw the powerful muscles of the struggling men standing out like cords beneath their clothing as they braced their limbs for the throw. But, though a man of great strength, the Indian had not the skill in wrestling possessed by his antagonist, and scarcely more strength. Tom Western threw his right leg forward, made a mighty effort, and the heels of the Indian rose in the air, and he fell with crashing force upon his head and shoulders, shaking the ground in his fall, and lay senseless.

"Whoop!" yelled Jack. "Cock-a-doodle-doo! Hip-hi-yi and ad infinitum. You done that trick mighty well, Tom, and the ha'r is yours."

Waubena lay senseless upon the earth, the blood running in a little rill from a wound upon his forehead, where the first shot of Zillah had cut the flesh. Western looked down at him with an inquisitive glance.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, we have got the big gun of the Comanches, Captain Waubena," he said. "The question is, what are we to do with him?"

"Take him into camp and show him to the boys," said Jack. "With his august permission, I reckon I'll take a small matter of a hitch about his arms, in case he should git rampagerious."

While Jack was tying the chief, which he did in a very artistic manner, Western turned to Zillah with his frank smile.

"I'm glad we came in time, miss," he said. "The rascal intended to make you a prisoner, it seems."

"Yes, sirs; you have my hearty thanks for your well-timed assistance."

"You will excuse me if I say I am puzzled to think how a lady of your appearance should be here at all."

"Never mind that," said Zillah, with a smile. "It is enough that you have laid me under a deep obligation, and I shall never forget it. May I ask the favor of your name?"

"Thomas Western."

"Sometimes called Mad Tom?"

"Precisely; that name will stick to me, no matter where I go. The next time I meet Jack Hays I'll lick him for putting it on me."

"Your name was not given you as an opprobrious epithet," she said; "but as a synonym of all that is brave and daring in man. I must now bid you good-by."

"You surely do not mean to wander alone through the chaparral?" said Western.

"I have friends near at hand, and here they are," she said, as three men, with her brother among them, came hastily from the bushes, weapons ready for a fray.

"What does this mean?" cried Coradi. "Zillah, have these men dared insult you?"

"No, no, brother. So far from that, they have saved me from the hands of this savage, who had taken me prisoner."

"Then they are my friends from this hour," said Coradi, extending a hand to each. "Sirs, I do not know you, but if the thanks of a man who has none left of all his kindred save this girl can avail you, they are heartily yours."

"You have said enough, sir," said Western. "As your sister is in such good hands, we will thank you to attend to our prisoner while we bring up our horses."

"Certainly," said Coradi, "though it will be hard work to keep my hands from him, bound as he is. He seems a powerful rascal, and is a chief."

"It is Waubena," said Zillah, as Jack and Western walked hastily away, "the great chief of the Comanches."

"Ha," said Coradi. "Is it possible that I see that infamous wretch, whose hand has made the plains red for many years? Good; he has fallen into the hands of the Texan Rangers, and they will know how to avenge the injuries he has heaped upon unhappy Mexico."

"Do you know him, brother?"

"Know him? All Mexico knows and fears him. Ten years ago, with a band of a thousand warriors at his back, he rode into the streets of Chihuahua, burned and destroyed on every side, and retreating, carried away with him a hundred of the first citizens, and it was years before they were all redeemed. And if you had seen the maimed, bleeding and disgraced creatures who came back—my God, do not let me talk of it, or I shall go mad, and kill him."

At this moment Jack came riding back, leading the war-horse of Waubena by the bridle. They had found him tied in a thicket not far away. He was closely followed by Western, and the two dismounted and signed to Coradi and his friends to hold the horses. By this time the chief had recovered from the stunning effect of his fall, and lay with his fierce eyes blazing upon Western's face.

"Get up," said Mad Tom, quietly.

The Indian rose without a word and looked steadily at the speaker. Then he muttered something in the Indian tongue.

"What does he say, Jack?" demanded Western.

"He wants us to kill him," replied Jack.

"But we ain't going to do it yet, not ef we know it. Say, you p'izen, audacious-looking rapsalloon, what do you want to die fur?"

"A chief who has been disgraced has no right to live," replied Waubena.

"Oh, climb on that hoss, you critter," replied Jack, indignantly. "Now do it, and do it quick."

Waubena obeyed, assisted by Tom Western, for his hands were still tightly bound, and they passed a lariat through the ring in the mustang's bit, and each fastened an end to his saddle-bow. Then, with a hearty farewell to Coradi and his companions, they rode out of the chaparral and started toward the Rangers' camp.

"I don't envy that Indian his chances with the Rangers," said Coradi. "They will tear him limb from limb. Let us go back to the temple, Zillah, and as quickly as we can. And let me say to you that you must ramble alone no more while the Comanches remain in this region."

Meanwhile the two Rangers rode across the plain, with their prisoner between them, his feet tied fast under the horse's belly, and his hands behind him. Each of his captors carried his rifle upon the saddle-bow ready for use at a moment's warning, and the precaution was necessary, for hardly had they made their appearance upon the plain, when they heard the well-known Comanche yell, and saw the band of Waubena pouring down from the ridge above.

"I thought so," said Western, coolly. "Steady, Jack; face the prisoner toward them."

They rode closer to the prisoner, and as the band drew nigh they recoiled again in terror at the fearful jeopardy of their chief. There sat the two Rangers, a little behind him, their deadly rifles nearly touching his person, ready in case the band advanced to send him to eternity.

"Speak to them, Waubena," cried Jack. "Tell them that if they come a step nearer you are a dead man."

Waubena looked on either side, but at each point he saw the brown muzzle of a rifle looking at him, waiting only the signal of assault upon the part of his men to pour their contents into his body. Captain Waubena was a brave man, but even he was not proof against that, and he shouted to his men to keep back. They obeyed, falling back out of short rifle range, and the Rangers rode on with their prisoner. The Indians followed cautiously, in agony at the danger of their chief, whom they idolized for his known power and desperate bravery. Thrice in the course of an hour the Rangers were compelled to pause, and threaten death to Waubena, but the Indians made no attack. The chief tried to muster courage to dare death and meet it for the sake of having these men die by the agonies of Indian torture, but a look at the rifles restrained him, and he kept quiet until he saw in front the Rangers camped by the three trees, and he called to his men to save him at all hazards. Then Jack and Western goaded his mustang with their knife-points, and he sprang away, bearing his master into the very center of the Rangers' camp. Up sprang the Texans, rifles in hand, and gave the Indians a volley, but they did not wait for the charge. Without

Waubena at their head they were nothing in the hands of the resolute Texans, and the last feathered head-dress disappeared beyond the first roll of the prairie before the Rangers could mount, when they were recalled by the stentorian voice of Western.

"Come back, all of you. We have the chief; it will be easy to get the rest."

The Rangers, accustomed to fight on their own hook, yet readily obeyed the voice of their leader, and came trooping back, surrounding the great chief with angry cries. Not one among them but had suffered losses at the hands of the Comanches, and no chief had led them oftener than the renowned Captain Waubena. In imminent danger, he sat smiling grimly, looking at his captors, and daring them to do their worst. It was with the utmost difficulty that Western and Jack restrained them from cutting him down on the spot, and this was what the savage leader seemed to invite, for he taunted them in no measured words as cowards and fools, until they were almost frantic, and half a dozen rifles were leveled at his heart.

"Down with your rifles, lads," cried Western. "Don't you see that you are doing just what the scoundrel wants?"

The rifles were lowered sullenly and reluctantly, and the owners looked at him for an explanation.

"Sudden death is the best fate this Comanche can expect; you agree to that, do you not?" he said.

"Yes; it's too good for him, that's a fact," said one of the most forward among the Rangers.

"That is what he is fishing for," said Mad Tom. "Now, don't humor him, and it will cut him to the heart more quickly than a dozen rifle balls could do. He has a great deal to answer for, and he can't do it in a moment. He belongs to us, of course, and we will deal with him as we see fit, but he must not die yet."

"All right, Mad Tom," said one of the ring-leaders, unlocking his rifle. "You know best."

"Then take him off the horse and tie him to that tree."

The men obeyed, and the chief, who was frowning angrily because he had not incensed his enemies to give him the death he coveted, was unbundled from the horse only to be tied fast to the tree. At this moment Mabel, who had been hurried to the rear under guard at the first prospect of a fight, was brought back, and started as she saw in the prisoner the chief from whom she had escaped in the woods.

"You know the critter, don't you, little gal?" said Jack. "Come over hyar. This is Mad Tom Western, the likeliest boy on the boundless plains of the West. Miss Mabel—"

The two looked at one another in mutual surprise, and Mabel extended her hand eagerly. "Is it possible!" she said. "You here?"

They had met at last, for Tom Western was the man who had saved Mabel from the flames on that fearful night in New Orleans, and for the first time they looked into each other's faces since that hour.

CHAPTER IX.

BEWARE!

"WHAT!" roared Jack. "Do you know one another then, arter all?"

"I ought to know this gentleman," said Mabel, "since he saved my life, and never gave me an opportunity of thanking him."

"It was rather impolite in me to cut away as I did," said Western, flushing vividly, "but to tell the truth, I don't like to be thanked for something any man ought to do. There; don't say any thing about it."

"Has my father seen you?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Dunham."

"And did you recognize him?"

"I did, but I did not want him to recognize me, so I kept quiet. He has looked at me in a puzzled way a number of times, but I put all the brass I had into my face, and he gave it up."

"Oh, blame my cats of you hadn't orter be licked, Tom Western," said Jack. "You never told me that you know'd anything about our Mabel, and I don't take it friendly, I don't."

"Never mind that now, Jack. There is work before us, and the quicker we do our work the better. Boys, you all have some private revenge to work upon the Comanches, but not one among you has so deep an interest as I. Of all the dearest loved ones of my father's house, I am the only one spared by their merciless hands. Knowing this, you will understand that it is not from love for the race that I ask you to keep the chief awhile, as a hold upon his tribe. As long as he is in our hands, they dare not do us any harm, for they know that the first blow

they strike will be a signal for the death of Waubena. Think what a terrible power we retain by keeping him alive, and that we only arouse them to new acts of vengeance by slaying him now. What do you say?"

"Keep him," was the unanimous response. "You are allus right, Mad Tom."

"Then mount and away. Mr. Nelson, do you ride with us?"

"As far as Dunham's place. I wish to see the master of the ranch."

"All right; we shall be glad of your company. Dick Dempsey, a word with you, if you please."

The two rode apart and laying a hand upon the knee of the dark-browed Ranger, Western looked steadily into his face. Each read in the eyes of the other unconquerable hatred, for the knowledge that each loved the same woman had sprung up between them. Western spoke but one word:

"Beware!"

Dempsey made no reply, and signing to him to take his place in the ranks, Mad Tom rode to the head of the column, and they started for Dunham's. Mabel rode by the side of the leader, and Brinsley Nelson just behind them, watching them intently. He saw a new complication, one of which he had not thought, and his busy brain was at work. They reached Dunham's at nightfall, and Mabel was in the arms of her mother.

Who shall tell of the wild endearments of that meeting! The stout Rangers turned their heads aside, and even the cold-blooded Nelson was touched. When the greeting was over, and Mabel was standing with one hand locked in her father's and the other about her mother's neck, she turned to Nelson and called to him to approach.

"This is the gentleman to whom you are indebted for my safety. Mr. Nelson—"

She paused in dismay, for she saw her mother's face turn white, while her father cast one horrified look at the immovable countenance of Nelson, and sprung forward with uplifted hand.

"You here, Brinsley; have you dared?"

"Gently, gently, old friend," said Nelson. "Remember we are not alone."

Nelson's eyes had a strange glitter, and Dunham retired, looking at him wildly.

"Come into the house, Walter," he said, coolly. "I have a few words to say to you. Mr. Dempsey, will you be so kind as to hold my horse?"

He dropped his bridle into the hands of the Irishman, and followed Dunham into the house. Once inside the expression of his face changed, and he turned savagely upon the older man.

"How dare you meet me in this manner, Walter Dunham? You know, or you ought to know, if the light of reason has not entirely deserted you, that you have greater cause to fear me than I have to dread anything you can do."

"Why have you sought me out?" moaned Dunham. "I had thought to bury myself in this wild region, out of the reach of all who had ever known me, and make atonement for the past."

"I did not seek you here. No one could be more surprised than I was when I met your daughter wandering through the chaparral alone, and she told me her name. I demand from you, in the name of the past, that you receive me as a friend into your household, to come and go as I will."

"We can never be friends, sir."

"I am aware of that, but we can put on the outward seeming of friends. Do you agree to this?"

"I must; but why should we not separate again, and meet no more upon earth?"

"Because I do not choose so to do. You and I have still some interests in common, and what they are you shall know in due season."

"Your presence will be too much for my wife to endure."

"She must get over that foolish feeling. Go to her when you have the opportunity and tell her that only upon this condition will I refrain from crushing you to the earth. I have only to go outside and put the papers in my possession into the hands of Tom Western and he will be obliged to arrest you."

"I will speak to my wife," said Dunham, "but I had hoped never to see your wicked face again. You know, none so well as you, how circumstances conspired against me in that fearful hour, and He to whom the secrets of every heart are known is aware that I have repented my hasty act, in unavailing tears."

"Prove that before a jury. Do you promise, or must I use the power in my hands?"

"I promise."

"Enough; go out and bid your friends welcome, but let me advise you to beware of Dick Dempsey. He loves your daughter, and would do anything to make her his wife."

"That scoundrel! How dare he aspire so high?"

"This is a strange country, my worthy friend," said Nelson, with a light laugh. "If our good friend Dick knew all, he might say that you were no better than himself."

"You will drive me mad if you do not take your face out of my sight, at least for a time. How your hate has followed me for the last five years!"

"You mistake me utterly, my good friend. I do not hate you, although it is through you that I am what I am. It was in your power to mold me as clay in your hands; but, for a fault less than your own, you drove me out from among men, and made me an outcast, with a price upon my head."

"If I fall, so must you."

"Hardly; I have proofs and you have not. Do not waste your time in useless words, Walter, but do as I tell you."

When Walter Dunham came out of the house, after this interview, it seemed as if twenty years had been added to his age. Mrs. Dunham came to him, but he made a signal to her not to speak, and she went into the house, with a lingering look at his pale face.

"Mr. Dunham and myself are old friends," said Nelson, "and meeting me so unexpectedly has quite unmanned him. Do you intend to camp in this vicinity, Mr. Western?"

"Yes; we camp in the bend, two miles below."

"You don't intend to leave the vicinity of Dunham Ranch for the present," said Nelson, laughing, although a shadow passed over his face directly after. "Where do you propose to leave your prisoner?"

"We take him with us. Mr. Dunham, we shall be forced to lay you under contribution now and then for beef, but we shall be willing to pay for any thing we use."

"Any thing I have is at your service, Mr. Western," said Dunham. "My daughter has whispered a secret in my ear, that you are the young man I have vainly sought since that fire in New Orleans. I beg that you will make my house your home while you remain in this section."

"Thank you; after I have made my camp I will return, as I wish to see more of you. Do you intend to stay over night, Mr. Nelson?"

"I believe so; the plains are hardly safe."

"Would you be so kind as to step aside a moment? I have something to tell you."

The two men walked a few hundred yards together and stopped.

"I don't say much to you, Nelson," said Mad Tom, "and you know why. May I ask what trick you are up to now?"

"You may ask," said Nelson, with a sneer.

"And you will not tell me?"

"You fathom my meaning to a nicety, friend Tom. Now look here; you attend to your business and I will attend to mine."

"That is exactly what I am going to do, Nelson, but unfortunately our vocations seem to join issue at this point. I am a reader of human faces, and I know that you hold some power over Mr. Dunham which you mean to use to his hurt."

"Is that so?" said Nelson, with his malicious laugh. "Why will you be so ridiculous as to interfere with something which does not in any way concern you, Tom? If I have a power over this Walter Dunham, you at least have nothing to do with it."

"Nothing beyond this, that, if you do any injury to this family I will break every bone in your body," replied Western, coolly.

"You will?"

"I said so, and I will keep my word. Now, don't attempt to draw a pistol, on me, for if you do I will hit you, and if I hit you the rope that is spinning for you will be wasted."

"Curse you, I will have a bloody revenge for this."

"All right, Nelson. Nothing against that if you can get it, but in the mean time I might be busy. I have taken an interest in this family, and you know me. I thought it best to warn you."

"I defy you."

"All right again; defy me if you choose, but do you know that I've got a trifling hold upon you?"

"Nonsense."

"Let me whisper a secret in your ear." He bent his head, and whispered a sentence in the ear of Nelson, who staggered back, glar-

ing at him with wildly-dilating eyes. Taken by surprise, the mask of icy stoicism he usually wore had fallen off, and the deadly terror which had taken possession of him showed itself in his face.

"Laughable to think of, friend Nelson," said Western, in the same quiet tone, "but apt to tell against you if the worst comes to the worst. Just bear this in mind, will you, and to-morrow morning take yourself away."

Nelson made no reply, but his eyes gleamed with deadly hate.

"By the way, you had better take Dick Dempsey when you go, for if he remains after you leave I shall be obliged to hang him."

"What do I know of Dick Dempsey?" blustered Nelson.

"What do you know of him? Tish, man; don't be foolish. Who came to you in the chaparral and wanted you to keep Miss Dunham for him? I don't want any spies among my Rangers, so carry him with you, or he shall hang."

"You seem to know a great deal about my business."

"I'll make it more my business if you trouble my friends. I am coming up here to-night, and will see you again."

Nelson turned hurriedly away, and as he passed Dempsey, managed to whisper a word in his ear. The Irishman nodded in reply, and the next moment the word for march was given, and the band rode away along the river-bank, with the towering form of Mad Tom at their head. After a short ride they pitched their camp in the bend, and Dempsey, when his horse was safely picketed, came to Jack Fenway and asked permission to go up to the ranch to see a Mexican stockman, whom he knew, and Jack gave him the permission required. Hardly was he out of the camp when Jack called to Buttrick, and gave him a whispered order, and shortly after the scout left camp, taking the same course with Dempsey. Jack then went to Western and told him what he had done.

"Very well, Jack; you have done right. Now see that the Indian is properly secured, for it will not do to let him get loose."

"I'll make a spread-eagle of the red cuss," said Jack. "He won't git away from my hitch, I tell you."

He hurried away, and calling two of his companions, they hastened to secure the Indian for the night. He was laid flat upon his face, with a strong lariat confining his hands and feet. Another lariat was fastened to each wrist and ankle, leading to four small trees which grew nearly at the angles of a square about the spot where they had laid him down. These were tightly fastened to the trees, and it was impossible for the prisoner to move in the least.

"Thar," said Jack. "I don't reckon you'll git away this night. Jim Davidson and Kit Stanley, you two git your rifles and stand over him. If he stirs, give him one."

Buttrick was gone but a few moments, and then came back and had an interview with Mad Tom. Directly after the young leader rode out alone, but he disposed his weapons in such shape that they were ready for use at a moment's warning. He rode at a slow trot, his keen eyes flashing from side to side, in evident expectation of danger. He had not trusted in vain, for as he passed through a wood four dark forms sprung up before him. If they had taken him by surprise he must have gone down, but his pistols cracked before they had time to show themselves fairly, and his eye did not fail him. The two at whom he fired rolled to the earth and did not stir, but the others sprung at him with gleaming knives. Reining his horse backward until he lay almost on his haunches, he wheeled him in such a way that when the iron hoofs descended they crushed the foremost assailant to the earth, while at the same time the strong right hand of the rider shot out and grasped the last assailant by the throat with such fell force, that the larynx seemed to crack under his iron fingers, and the next moment he lay helpless across the saddle of the Ranger, unable to move. For the first time the young man shouted, and Jack Fenway and Buttrick came up, panting heavily.

"Have you got the lantern, Jack?" said Mad Tom, coolly.

Jack produced a small lantern with a slide, and opening it, threw its light upon the face of the prisoner. It was Dick Dempsey, the traitorous Ranger.

CHAPTER X.

YANTIC AT HIS TRICKS.

"BUTTRICK was right," said Mad Tom, quietly, allowing the almost senseless form of his enemy to slide from the saddle. "Tie him up, boys."

"Don't you think it would save time to tie the rope round his neck instead of his arms?" said Jack. "The boys will hang him, sartin sure, and they won't tie half so genteel a knot as we will, I'm sure."

"Don't talk that way, Jack," whined the traitor, who was cowed at the near approach of death. "I was led into this yer, I was indeed."

"Like enuff; you kain't tell us anything about it. Why, Lord love ye, Ned Buttrick, hyar, followed every step you took to-night, and see you set the ambush on Mad Tom, and he know'd whar you was jest as well as you did."

"Why didn't I use the rifle?" moaned Dempsey. "I could have tumbled him easy."

"You didn't want to make a row, and trusted too much to the Greasers. Give me holt of that rope, Ned. Excuse me if I tie your feet rayther tight, but sech is life—sech is life. Tother foot, please; that's the ticket. Hold up your hands now, and turn yer wrist a trifle to the right. Now you feel as easy as a pocket in a shirt, don't you? No more trouble fer you till the boys tuck you up to a swinging limb, which they'll do at sun-up, sure."

"You don't mean it, Jack. You wouldn't hang me; I'm too useful."

"You ain't useful enuff to keep. I'm afraid you'd spile of we tried it on. Bring up the hose, Ned."

Buttrick hurried away and soon appeared, leading a horse from the thicket, upon which the prisoner was mounted. With both limbs on the same side of the horse, and with Buttrick leading the animal and Jack walking by his side, they started on their return.

Mad Tom rode up to Dunham's, gave his horse to a boy, and was shown into the house, where he found Brinsley Nelson making himself quite at home, while both Dunham and his wife looked downcast and uneasy, and Mabel, not understanding the cause of their distress, also felt its influence.

Nelson looked quickly at his enemy—for such he now knew the Ranger to be—and saw that he had been engaged in a struggle. His hunting-coat and shirt were torn open, revealing his muscular breast, and there were spots of blood upon his garments.

"I beg your pardon for not coming sooner, Mr. Dunham," he said, "but I met some fellows upon the road who occupied a portion of my time unavoidably, and that must be my excuse."

"Which is Mad Tom Western's way of saying that he has been in a fight," said Nelson, gayly. "Is it not so, most puissant Ranger?"

"Something like it. By the way, Mr. Dunham, I believe you must get another stockman, for your Mexican Gondo will not be able to serve."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that he was one of a party of four who attempted to murder me while on my way here, and he is dead."

Mabel uttered an involuntary cry of horror, and Mrs. Dunham turned her pale face inquiringly toward the speaker.

"You are not hurt?" cried Mabel, eagerly, coming toward him.

"Not in the least, although I am hardly in proper attire to make a visit to ladies. I will thank you if you will show me where I can wash my hands, Mr. Dunham."

"Come this way," said Dunham, leading the way to the back of the house, through which they passed into a small shed, where there was a washstand and basin.

"Come a little nearer, Mr. Dunham, and be so kind as to speak low. What do you know of that man inside?"

"I know him to be a cold-blooded, heartless man, one who has made my life a burden to me."

"Yes; I was satisfied that he was persecuting you, and so I told him this afternoon."

"He told you nothing?" screamed Dunham, turning pale.

"Hush! Do you want to bring him out upon us? He told me nothing, of course, and I did not expect him to do so. I am satisfied that he sent those men to murder me, this very night."

"But you cannot prove it?"

"No, but I know enough of him to be able to drive him out of Texas, and I will do it, if that is your desire."

"Nothing would make me so happy, Mr. Western. I desire to forget the past, and be a new man. I have never done any man an intentional wrong, but for all of that I am in this man's power."

"Leave it to me, and for the present treat him well and do not let him see that his presence

is very obnoxious to you, or he may strike before the time. Have you ever injured him?"

"He says so. Several years ago I exposed a criminal act which he had done, and forced him to fly the State. Since that time he has labored to destroy me, and succeeded so far as to drive me from my native city to this place. Do not ask me how it was done, for I dare not tell you."

"Enough; let us go in, and give no hint that you have spoken to me."

As they came in Nelson looked suspiciously at Dunham, but his face told them nothing, and he took his seat at the table with a brighter look than he had worn for some time.

"Let us have the cards, Mabel," he said gayly. "I have no doubt the gentleman would like a game at whist."

"With all my heart," said Nelson, drawing his chair nearer the table. "Miss Mabel, will you be my partner?"

"With pleasure," said Mabel, "after Mr. Western has satisfied me with regard to this infamous attack upon him. Did the men intend to rob you?"

"They would hardly make much at that game," said Western, laughing. "I gave about all the money I had to that deformed boy who brought your letter."

"Yantic reaped a rich harvest that day. He informs me that he had nearly two hundred dollars," said Nelson.

"The boys were inclined to be generous, and gave freely for news of Miss Mabel," said Western. "In regard to this attack, I think personal revenge had something to do with it, for the leader was a man of my own party who has, for some unknown cause, begun to hate me. You know him—Richard Dempsey."

"Hal!" said Nelson, "is the fellow dead, then?"

"No, I sent him a prisoner to camp. Shall I deal? Cut the cards."

Nelson cut, and Western began to deal, apparently intensely interested in the game, but in reality watching Nelson, closely.

"Perhaps you can get something out of your prisoner?"

"No doubt of it. From what he said I am inclined to believe that he will tell anything I ask him, to save his life. I would set him at liberty if he would give me the name of the person who set him on, and witness against him."

Nelson went on sorting his cards, coolly, as if the conversation had only ordinary interest for him, and Western felt an involuntary admiration for his pluck.

"That man has nerve," he muttered. "What a man he might make if he would turn his talents in the right direction!"

"The Rangers would make short work of that person, I suppose?" said he, quietly.

"They would hang him on the first tree."

"I hope you will get the rascal," said Nelson. "I play the king."

Western changed the subject, for he had fathomed his man, and knew that he had no ordinary person to deal with. While the game goes on let us return to the Rangers' camp and see how it fared with the captive chief and Dick Dempsey.

The traitor had been laid upon the earth, close to the chief who did not turn his head at his approach. The guards, who were better at fighting than watching, kept up bravely until after twelve, by the aid of their pipes and frontier stories, then began to nod. Dick Dempsey, lying upon his back and looking at the moon, heard the faint chirp of a squirrel overhead, and looked up and saw the face of Yantic, looking down upon him from a tree, and his heart gave a great leap at the thought that he might yet escape from the danger that threatened him. Yantic having attracted his attention, again concealed himself amid the leaves, and all was silent. The guards dropped asleep, one by one, until every man was locked in slumber. It was well for Dempsey that neither Fenway nor Ned Buttrick, had hinted at his crime, or he might have been pendent upon one of the branches overhead, instead of remaining in captivity. He knew his quondam companions too well to expect any mercy at their hands, and his only hope was escape. He lay at the foot of the tree, in a half-reclining posture, his hands and feet bound, and his body fastened to the tree by means of a stout lariat, passed about it, and then around the tree. Soon after the appearance of Yantic he was conscious that the rope around the tree was loose, and he swayed his body outward, showing his bound hands. Yantic had fastened a bowie to an elastic pole, and reaching down, managed to cut the cords upon the hands of the prisoner. The next moment

the bowie was dropped point downward, sticking in the soft earth close to Dempsey's thigh. He did not move his hands until satisfied that the guards were asleep, and then, passing his right hand under his leg, he freed his limbs from the incumbrance by a single sharp cut. Even now he did not move, for one of the guards stirred uneasily, and a moment after raised his head, and began to fill his pipe, casting a cursory glance at Dempsey and the Indian. To all appearance they remained bound as before, for Dempsey had taken the precaution to put his hands behind him, and lie down again. He had not yet thrown off the several lariats from his feet, and if the guard should content himself with a distant examination, all might yet be well. But Dempsey grasped the heavy bowie, fully determined, if detected, to strike the guard to the heart and make his escape. The man half rose, and looked closely at the Indian, and seemed about to do the same with Dempsey, and the fellow was gathering himself for the fatal blow, when the indolence of the Ranger saved him, for he sat down again, and smoked placidly for fifteen minutes. At the end of that time he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and drawing his blanket under his head, lay down and fell asleep. Dempsey now began to look about him, and the natural evil in his nature showed itself, for he thought what mischief he could do without endangering himself. What could he do more than get the captive chief at liberty?

The Indian lay almost within reach of his hand. Raising himself slowly he cut the two lariats which led to the trees from the feet of the warrior, and the slight strain caused the Indian to turn his head a little, and at a single glance he comprehended all, and did not move, but watched his unknown friend quietly. He felt the cords upon his feet and hands severed, and knew that he was free, but lay quiet waiting for the blood to come back into his benumbed limbs. Dempsey arose and glided behind the tree, and directly after, Yantic was by his side. He suffered the deformed lad to lead the way, and they stole out of the camp, crossed the belt of woods and reached a place where two horses stood saddled, waiting for them. They had hardly gained the saddle, when a wild, blood-curdling shout was heard, and the confused trampling of horses, and directly a mob of terrified mustangs swept by them like the wind, and close behind them, mounted upon a strong bay, which was the favorite steed of Jack Fenway, came the redoubtable chief, goading the horse with a broken branch of mesquit.

"Follow!" he cried in Spanish, and the three bounded across the plain toward the river, going at the best pace of their horses. They heard the angry cries of the Rangers and a babel of human voices, and the countenance of the great chief lit up joyfully.

"Ha!" he cried. "The Rangers are dogs. Let me show my white brothers the way to safety."

They plunged together into the roaring stream and gained the other shore, and rode swiftly away at some distance from the bank, across the boundless plain.

CHAPTER XI.

MAD TOM'S ARGUMENT.

THE shouts of the Rangers had a reason in them, for the chief had done much mischief before he took to flight. He had crept into the center of the corral of horses, picked out the best one, and stampeded the rest, leaving the Rangers utterly unable to follow him. Curses both loud and deep were heard as the men ran half frantic, to and fro, looking for their animals. Some only ran a short distance and were quickly recovered, but, even then, pursuit was hopeless before morning, and by that time they knew that the fugitives would put many miles of prairie between them and the camp, and in all probability safely join the band of Waubena.

"I never was so beat in my life," said Jack. "How the devil did they git out of the litch we put them in? Jim, you've been asleep."

"I?" roared the guard, indignantly, oblivious to the fact that he had been snoring for the last hour. "I never slept a wink."

"Mighty likely," said Jack. "You see these ropes hev been cut. Now, I know that neither of the pris'ners hed a knife."

"Don't make no diff'rance," cried Jim, dogmatically. "I wasn't asleep, and I looked at the Injin half an hour ago."

"Yes, and was he tied?"

"Tighter than tightness."

"It's a mighty queer thing; kaint say I understand it. Jim, git yer hoss and ride up to the ranch and tell the capt'n. The rest of you scatter and find the hosses."

Those who were mounted were soon scampering in every direction across the plains, picking up the scattered horses wherever they could be found. It was three o'clock in the morning before all were collected, and even then, one was missing—the bay which had been confiscated for the use of the chief.

"Now you mark my words," roared Jack; "that cussid Injin hez got my hoss."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Jim. "The old bay was a likely beast, and mout be Waubena wanted a good 'un."

"Orter hev yer ha'r raised, by gracious," said Jack. "Oh, why didn't we trick that Injin up when we had him? See hyar: ef he's got my hoss I'll hev his sculp, ef I go to the Comanche village to git it; you hear me."

The game at the ranch was kept up to quite a late hour, and was broken up by Mabel rising and begging to be excused, while she looked after the rooms of their guests. Soon after they retired to rest, but two persons at least did not sleep. These were Tom Western and Nelson. Mad Tom was well assured that Nelson would not leave Dempsey in captivity if he could aid him, and he was glad that the strange man was put into the next room, where his slightest movement could be heard. To the surprise of Western he retired at once, and his heavy breathing could be distinctly heard, as the windows were open, and hardly two feet apart.

"It looks as if he didn't mean to do anything," said Tom to himself, "but I won't give it up yet."

He sat for over an hour, and at last gave up the idea of watching longer, but lay down upon the outside of the bed, without removing any of his clothing, so as to be ready to start up at a moment's warning. He was asleep before he was aware, and had slept a short time, when he awoke with a start, and listened. The heavy breathing of Nelson was no longer audible.

"Fooled!" he hissed, springing to the open window. "The scoundrel is off."

The room was on the ground floor, and stepping cautiously out upon the grass, he looked into the window of Nelson's chamber. As he expected, it was vacant, and the bird flown. There was nothing for it but to wait for his return, and so he lit a cigar and seated himself at the window, where he could see any one who approached. Not long after Nelson came sauntering slowly toward the window, smoking placidly, and was about to enter his window, when Western bent forward and spoke:

"Been out on a little excursion, eh?"

"Oh, are you awake too? Yes, I found that I could not sleep very well, and so I took a stroll and a cigar. Will you allow me to come into your room?" said Nelson, coolly.

"If you please."

"Thank you; I believe I will. I must talk to some one, and why not you? I know you were a trifle hard on me this afternoon, but I'll overlook that."

He stepped into the room, took a chair, and smoked in indolent ease, blowing spiral wreaths of smoke from his mouth from time to time.

"You are a magnificent rascal!" thought Tom. "Can I match you, I wonder?"

"Did you ever see a more beautiful woman than Miss Mabel?" said Nelson. "Bah, you rascal, you are sweet on her; you know you are."

"She is a beautiful girl," replied Tom; "and what is more, a good and pure woman."

"Pity her father should not be exactly on the same pattern," said Nelson. "But for that, she might make any match she chose. But, we ought not to visit the sins of the father upon the children, I suppose."

"You will go too far yet," muttered Tom, setting his teeth hard.

"Oh, as to that, you and I know each other pretty well. There is no great love lost, and why attempt to conceal it? You have doubted that I have any hold upon Mr. Dunham, and you took him into the wash-room this evening to warn him against me."

"One can't help admiring this scoundrel," thought Tom. "He has a long head."

"You need not apologize," said Nelson. "I have also warned him against you, so that we are even. I believe you have some idea of making Miss Mabel your wife?"

"What is that to you?"

"A great deal. I propose to marry the lady myself, overlooking her father's failings."

"You!"

"Now keep quiet, please. If there is anything I do dislike, it is seeing a man in a passion. Now don't do it."

"I will twist your head behind you."

"I object, but let that pass. I have come

here to prove to you that I was right with regard to our friend, Dunham, and if you will be so kind as to light that lamp, I will show you the papers."

Tom complied, and the man took out a large pocket-book, from which he extracted two or three newspaper slips, which he sorted in his hand while the lamp was being lighted.

"Be so good as to read these papers carefully, and give me your opinion upon them. Take them in the order in which they are numbered—one, two, three."

Western took the papers, and put them before him, reading them carefully in the order named. Once or twice he looked at the immovable face of the man beside him, who sat puffing at his cigar, and waiting for Western to finish.

"You have read them. Now, I ask you plainly, have I a case against the man whose name is mentioned here?"

"If the man is guilty—"

"If"; you have not read the papers carefully."

"The evidence is circumstantial, and was acted upon by an irresponsible mob. The man mentioned here may be a villain, or a deeply injured and innocent person."

"That is your opinion?"

"That is my opinion."

"Another question; suppose I was to show these choice extracts to the Rangers, do you think that even your power could keep them from hanging the perpetrator of this crime?"

"No."

"Then I have made my case. Walter Dunham is that man, who has fled from his native State under the shadow of his horrible guilt, this deed without a name, escaping the righteous justice of his fellow-townsmen almost by a miracle. Do you think this man dare refuse me anything?"

Western was silent, and his noble face worked strangely.

"It cannot be true," he said, hoarsely.

"It is true, by heaven, and I will prove it so, if you force me to it. Look you; to-day you threatened me if I did not leave this place, but I know that your love for Mabel Dunham is stronger than your sense of justice. I desire to spare this guilty man if it can be done, but if he is obdurate, I will betray him. As for you, let me see you dare approach the woman I have chosen, and her father is doomed."

Western sat speechless, looking at the face of the speaker.

"The girl does not care for you," he said, at last.

"Perhaps not now; but, I can give her good reasons to give me her love."

"If you dare to persecute her, remember that we are in Texas, and that your life is of short duration."

"You dare not move; I am satisfied of that."

"We shall see. I will unravel this tissue of falsehood, and make the name of Walter Dunham clear in the eyes of all men. When you ask me to believe that this man, who has the face of a saint, could by any possibility be guilty of this shameful crime, I tell you to your face that you lie."

"You shall see, you shall see."

"And now leave my room, or I will throw you out of the window."

"Give me my papers and I will go."

"Not at all; I will keep these pretty articles to refer to."

"Give them up!" hissed Nelson. "You scoundrel, you robber!"

Tom Western had been controlling himself for some time, and now his boiling passion could no longer be restrained. He made a sudden leap, and grasping Nelson by the shoulder and hip, flung him headlong from the window upon the greensward, and he was nearly ridden down again by a horseman, who came dashing up at full gallop. It was the sleeper, Jim, who was coming up to inform his leader of the escape of the prisoner.

"Hi, look out!" cried Jim. "Git out of the way!"

At this moment the curtain of Mabel's room was pushed aside, and she cast a startled look at the strange scene below. She saw Nelson rolling on the sod, Tom Western, who had leaped from the window, standing in a belligerent attitude above him, and Jim reining back his horse to prevent riding over the prostrate man.

As Nelson rose from the earth he caught a glimpse of Mabel's face, and the hand which he had laid upon the pistol dropped to his side.

"You shall pay for this," he hissed.

"Any time and anywhere you like. It can't come too quickly, sir, and if you do not get into

your room in half a minute, I shall be under the painful necessity of *throwing* you in."

As he seemed very likely to keep his word, the other did not think proper to wait, but he must give his retreat a color.

"I never quarrel in the presence of a lady," he said, raising his hat to Mabel, and by the action, showing Tom Western that they were observed. Having shot this bolt, Nelson stepped into the low window of his room, leaving Western and sleeper Jim to their own devices.

"That cuss wants to git stamped to death," he said. "I'm arter you, captain, fur the fat is all in the fire. Dick Dempsey and Waubena have cut their stick."

"What! escaped?"

"Jest so; got off as clean as a whistle, and took Jack Fenway's hoss with 'em. Fightin' Jack is tearin' round as ef he had a bumblebee in the seat of his pantaloons."

"Oh, fools, fools! Why did you not chase them?"

"Cause that rotted Waubena stamped the hosses, and we couldn't. We've got 'em all back but Jack's, and that the Injun has got, I reckon. Hows'ever, he left his own behind, so Jack has got a mount, but he don't take it kind, fur all that."

"This is a nice muddle," said Tom. "You may look for burning houses and dead white men now, unless we can get at this scoundrel. Stay here a moment."

He entered the house by the window, and rapped at the door of Dunham's room.

"You must excuse me troubling you. Don't rise, I beg of you, but I have a message from my camp, and there is trouble. I must be off at once, so give good-by to Miss Mabel for me."

He strode away to the stable, saddled his horse, and rode away by the side of Jim. As soon as they were out of sight, Nelson also came out, found his horse, and rode away at a break-neck pace across the prairie. Next morning the Rangers were far away upon the plains near the chaparral, lying in ambush for the Indians, whom they knew to be somewhere in this quarter, but they had come too late to intercept their late captures, who were already in the chaparral, perhaps with the band. As morning broke the Rangers saw a man riding at full speed toward the chaparral, and as he came nearer they recognized Brinsley Nelson, and close behind him rode Yantic. They plunged into the chaparral not far away, and disappeared. Western was about to order two scouts to follow them, when something happened which drew his attention another way. A body of Indians were defiling slowly from a pass, and *debouching* upon the prairie not far away. They were about seventy in number, and were a part of the same band which we have seen before. Brawny ruffians, hideously painted, but skillful riders and brave men. The Rangers could be held in leash no longer, for they had been panting for the fray many days, and Western formed them in the edge of the chaparral. The Indians came riding down at a slow trot, their spearheads glistening in the sun, and their bronzed, warlike faces gleaming savagely under their unkempt masses of dark hair. Just then a rattling volley swept through their ranks, and the terrible voice of Mad Tom Western shouted:

"Charge!"

Then that terrible cavalry force, the most terrible in the world, because they literally have no fear of death, charged upon the Indians. With bridles dangling free, a pistol in one hand, a hatchet in the other, they bore down upon the surprised Indians. Although the number of Rangers was smaller than that of the party they assailed, they had the advantage of a surprise, and several saddles had been emptied by the first volley. But the Comanches, wheeling their horses, brandished their long spears and made a counter-charge. The Rangers closed with their enemies, and then ensued one of the most desperate hand-to-hand engagements known in the history of the State of Texas. After the first rush the Indians had thrown aside their spears and taken the ax and knife, weapons similar to those carried by the Texans, and in the use of which they were adepts. The shields of the Indians came in play here, and covered by these, they ward off many blows which would have been fatal. Foremost among the fighters, holding in his right hand a ponderous ax, and in the other a bowie of great length and weight, fought Mad Tom, and the Indians went down before him like chaff. At his right hand fought Jack Fenway, a terrible figure, spotted with the gore of his enemies, and dealing terrible blows. He had received a cut from a hatchet upon the forehead, and the blood from this wound had stain-

ed his whole face, but he did not seem to know that he had been touched. The wild prairie men were not less savage than their opponents, answering their wild whoops with cries which vied with theirs.

"Fight on, ye devils!" roared Jack, as he hewed down an Indian who crossed his path. "Fight for the honor of the Lone Star, and the memory of the dead. Give it to 'em. Take that, you red nigger."

Retreat was not thought of; every one knew that it was a duel a *vous-trance*, and that the conquered party had no hope of mercy. Here, locked in a deadly grapple, an Indian and a Ranger rolled from the saddle to the grass under the plunging feet of the horses, from which one at least would never rise. There, Tom Western tore a shrieking savage from his saddle, and with the force of his terrible arm dashed him to the earth. The deeds of the knights of old in battle with the Saracens could not surpass the headlong valor of these Texan heroes. Knives gleamed, pistols cracked, the scalp-cry sounded, and riderless horses careered over the plain, dragging after them the mangled body of a dead master, entangled in the stirrup. Yells of vengeance, groans of despair, blood and smoke, and then the veil lifted, and the hardy band of Rangers stood triumphant on the plain, and about them, in gory heaps, lay the slain Comanches, grim in death, grasping their weapons in their stiffened hands. They had fought their last battle, ridden upon their last raid, and died worthy the name of the warrior tribe of the Comanche.

The victors had not won their battle easily. Out of fifty Rangers who had begun the fray, ten were killed outright, as many more desperately injured, and not one had escaped without a wound. Jack Fenway, besides the cut upon the forehead, was wounded in the left thigh by a knife cut. Western was wounded in the shoulder, and all the rest were hurt in a greater or less degree. And all this in a ten-minute fight. There were sorrowful faces among the Rangers as they turned to view the bloody field, and saw the bodies of their friends lying among the dead forms of the Comanches. But, these were not times to waste sympathy or words. Some caught the scattered horses, pursuing and lassoing those which fled. Others picked up the wounded, and carried them into the shade, where their hurts could be attended to. There were no wounded Indians brought in, because, as Jack Fenway remarked, "thar wa'n't any thar." They searched everywhere for Waubena, but he was not to be found, and they were forced to the belief that the warlike chief had not been with the party, and was probably absent with the remainder of the band, upon some other expedition. The wounded men who could be moved were sent at once toward Dunham's, under guard, while the remainder of the Rangers buried the dead. Jack Fenway rode away across the ridge to bring reinforcements from a neighboring town, for the struggle could not end while Waubena lived.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE FATE.

THEY remained until night upon the plain where the fight had taken place, and then moved down through the pass. Leaving the wounded in charge of three men, with orders to keep close until sent for, they marched away for Dunham's, where they were to meet reinforcements under Jack Fenway.

As they crossed the last roll of the prairie, a loud cry of consternation broke from the livid lips of Tom Western, and putting spurs to his horse, he dashed wildly down the slope and saw this:

The Dunham ranch and stock-buts a mass of charred and blackened cinders, still smoking in places, while among the ruins lay the mangled forms of the defenders of the place, but so disfigured by wounds and flame that they had lost every trace of humanity. Western's great heart felt such a pang as it had never felt since the hour when he stood above the mangled forms of all the men of his race, and vowed vengeance on their murderers. For a moment he leaned, sick and giddy, upon the neck of his horse, but, manning himself by a mighty effort, he raised his hand to heaven, as if appealing to its justice against the perpetrators of this fearful deed.

"Buttrick," he said, "you ought to know who has done this."

"Comanches," replied Buttrick, whose eyes had been lingering upon the tracks about the place.

"Who do you think it is?"

"Waubena and his band."

"How many do you think he has with him?"

Buttrick descended from his horse and examined the tracks, and gave it as his opinion that not more than fifty were engaged in the fray. He examined the mangled remains, and decided that neither Dunham, Mabel, nor Mrs. Dunham were among them. They had been kept prisoners, though with what object it was hard to say.

"Boys," said Western, turning his flashing eyes upon the men, "are we good for fifty Indians? But, what is it, Buttrick?"

"White men; they came before the Indians, if I can make any thing by the signs."

"Ha! what does that mean?"

"They seem to have mixed with the Injins afterwards, and not as prisoners. This looks squally."

"We must not hesitate now, men; Blood for blood! Dave Tory, you ride back and hurry up Jack Fenway. Have him bring his men to the chaparral."

On the afternoon previous five men had ridden up to the ranch, with Brinsley Nelson at their head. The leader dismounted and rapped at the door, leaving his men outside. He was admitted by Walter Dunham, who started at the expression of savage hatred upon his face.

I came to your house determined to spare you, Walter Dunham, and in return you set your bravoes on to insult me, and I am here for vengeance. I wish to see your daughter."

Dunham closed all the doors of the room, and faced his enemy defiantly.

"You scoundrel," he hissed, "you shall not see Mabel."

"Shall not? Do you know that it is in my power to give you up to the vengeance of the Rangers?"

"Yes; but even then I must be the one to suffer, and not my innocent child."

"Will it be pleasant for her to see you hauled to death by the hands of the men you claim as your friends?"

"Better even than this daily torture. I may die, but I die an innocent man, and you know it. I am aware that the crime of which you accuse me is a horrible one, and, if I were really guilty, death would be an insufficient punishment; but I am innocent."

"You talk it well, Dunham. Stand aside and let me see your daughter."

"I refuse."

"Out of my way, you old dotard, or I will find a way to make you."

"I fear you not. You may find that this arm of mine has not yet lost its power."

Nelson raised his hand to his mouth and whistled. Instantly the door was flung open, and his men hurried in, with their pistols ready. At the same instant the door was opened at the other side, and Mabel appeared, looking with astonishment upon the scene.

"Mr. Nelson!" she said. "What does this mean?"

"It means that I have come to force your father to do me justice, but I do not mean to harm you. Walter Dunham, shall I speak before these men, or shall I send them out?"

Dunham had dropped into a chair with his head resting on a table.

"Send them out," he said, hoarsely. "The measure of my punishment is full."

The men passed out at a signal from Nelson, and the three were left together. For nearly an hour they remained there, and in the end Nelson threw open the door and invited his men to enter.

"Miss Mabel Dunham," he said, "I have called in these men as witnesses. Do you, before them, acknowledge my power over your father for life or death?"

"I do," said Mabel, in a stifled voice, full of agony.

"Do you promise before them to be my wife, when I shall claim you?"

"Do not promise," shrieked Dunham, starting up. "I will declare my guilt to all the world, and leave them to judge. Men, the crime of which he accuses me—"

But Mabel's hand was pressed upon his lips, and her arm about his neck.

"Father, father, be silent. I am willing to make any sacrifice for your good, to do anything which will save you. But, bear this in mind, I do not believe you guilty, but the verdict of the world is against you, and would sacrifice you. I promise to be your wife when you ask me, Mr. Nelson; does that satisfy you?"

"It does; Thompson, go to the stable and get out horses for three persons. Put side-saddles upon two of them for the ladies, and be quick."

The man moved away and came back directly with a face blanched by terror.

"The Injins are on us, capt'n, coming down the river."

Nelson rushed to the door and found the report was true. A strong force of savages were dashing down the plain, driving the terrified stockmen before them and now and then stopping to end the agonies of one of the unfortunate men who had fallen. Nelson turned pale, and went into the house, calling the men in after him.

By this time the remaining stockmen were in their huts, defending themselves as well as they could. Leaving the destruction of these men to about twenty of his force, Waubena dashed on to the ranch, and riding up to the door thundered on it with his spear-head.

"It is Waubena," said Nelson. "Stop; I can make terms with him, for I see that Dempsey is among them."

He passed out and closed the door and beckoned Dempsey to come closer.

"What is the meaning of this, Dick? do these men mean to attack my party?"

"I don't think they does," replied Dempsey, "for they knows that you sent Waubena help last night. Speak to him in Spanish; he understands it well enough."

"Does Waubena come to take the hand of a friend," he said, in the Spanish tongue, "or does he come with a spear in his hand?"

"Waubena has no spear for the just white man," replied the Indian. "He knows that aid came from his hand when he lay bound in the camp of his enemies. But he has come to destroy the home of a white settler and make him a prisoner."

"You cannot do that, Waubena. I was here before you, and they are in my hands. The white lady is to come into my lodge."

"What do you say?" roared Dempsey. "The girl is mine!"

"You had better be silent," cried Nelson, threateningly. "You know how I can punish a traitor."

"My brother is too fast," said Waubena. "I have promised to give the white girl to this good white man," laying his hand gently on the shoulder of Dempsey, "and he shall have her."

"He shall not."

"Look," said Waubena, with a kindling eye. "I love my white brother because he sent me help, but he must not come in the way of the purpose of a chief. My young men have tasted blood, and if they are made angry more scalps will hang at their girdles."

"You'd better give it up," said Dempsey, with a malicious grin. "Twill be all the worse for you if you don't."

Nelson made no reply, but stood looking moodily upon the earth. By this time the huts were in flames and the stockmen had fallen victims to the rage of their enemies. Not a man was left of all their number, and the Indians, drunk with gore, came clamoring about the house uttering their wild cries of vengeance, when the voice of their chief restrained them. Nelson saw that he could do no more than save his own men, but his eyes dwelt with savage light upon the face of Dempsey, who only answered by a look of scorn, and flinging himself from his horse he rushed into the house, followed by Nelson and the chief, whose face lighted up with savage joy as he saw Mabel. Dunham attempted some resistance, but he was speedily secured, and with Mabel and Mrs. Dunham, led out into the open air. As they rode away, the flames were curling about the walls of the devoted dwelling, and Mabel burst into tears.

"This is a terrible calamity," said Nelson, who rode by her side. "I hope you will believe that I had no part in this."

"I believe you, sir, but see what you have brought upon us all. Your falsehood to one who loves you, to poor Zillah, is recoiling upon your own head."

"Zillah!"

At that word a strange light came into the face of the man—a thought of such revolting heartlessness, of fearful villainy, that even he dare not breathe it. But the thought would come into his head nevertheless, and he saw in it a way out of his difficulties, when all else should fail, and he looked at Dempsey with a grim smile.

"You must not speak of Zillah," he said, hoarsely. "She has no claim upon me."

"No claim; she loves you, and you have said that you love her."

"Be silent, I say. The girl has been protected by me for two years, and if I have sometimes passed an idle hour in pampering her vanity I am sorry for it now."

"You have a cruel heart, man," said Mabel. "Leave me to ride alone, you false-hearted coward."

He reined back his horse with a fierce gesture, and rode back to the side of the chief, to whom he said something in a low tone of voice. The chief started and looked at him, and then the two fell somewhat behind the party, conversing eagerly. Dempsey looked back at them uneasily, for he feared that the cunning Nelson would yet overreach him, and take the prize from his grasp. The party headed up the river somewhat, to be out of the track of the Rangers should they return, and then crossed toward the chaparral, where they were to reach the remainder of the party. Little did they know that those brave warriors lay stark and stiff upon the prairie, where they had fallen by the hands of the Rangers. They camped that night upon the prairie, and rode on with the early light. This was some hours after the Rangers had withdrawn into the pass, after burying their dead where the Indians could not find them, and leaving the slain Indians where they lay. Rounding the point in the woods before mentioned, they came suddenly upon the battlefield, and Waubena literally reeled in his saddle as he looked upon that dreadful field. There, in ghastly heaps, lay the bodies of many of his best warriors, men who had followed him in his desperate raids upon the border, and his emotion was terrible. Plucking at the clothing on his breast with a look of fearful anger, his fierce eyes rolling, he rode closer to the scene of combat, while the long, low wail which bursts so spontaneously from the breast of an Indian when a warrior loses his scalp, rose from the lips of every Indian in the band. Nelson sat mute, as much surprised as any one at the strange sight before him. The Indians began to cast savage glances at the prisoners, and even at the men with Nelson, but no hand was raised against them, waiting as they were for the signal of the chief.

"Listen," cried Waubena, striding up to Nelson, and smiting him upon the breast with his open palm. "Did you know that the pride of the Comanche lay as low as this?"

"Would I come here with you if I had?"

The Indian nodded gravely, recognizing the truth of the remark, and gave orders to his men to set about burying their dead. The solemn ceremonies over, the chief turned to Nelson.

"Show us this hiding-place you speak of, and we will go there and wait, while more help comes from the Comanche village."

The other now took the lead, and they began to thread the mazes of the chaparral by the paths which Mabel had followed once before. As they neared the ruins, signal whistles were heard, and when the party came into the open space before the ruins, no one was in sight except Zillah and her brother, who were standing in the archway. Zillah uttered a cry of terror, and pointed to the horrible figure of Waubena, and Coradi recognized him.

"Ask no questions now, Coradi," said Nelson. "Zillah, retire to the cabin, and take Miss Dunham with you. And for you," he hissed in the ear of Mabel, "beware what you say to her, or it will bring a worse fate on her than losing my love."

Mabel looked scornfully at him by way of reply, and alighted, extending her hand to Zillah, and the two girls went away together.

"What is this, Mabel? Why do you not speak?" said Zillah.

"My poor girl, my dear girl, I dare not speak."

"Come into the cabin; you can speak there."

They entered and closed the door, and Zillah put both hands upon Mabel's shoulders and looked into her face with a wild, intent gaze.

"You do not speak; why were you brought here?"

"Zillah, have you still faith in Brinsley Nelson?"

"Ah!"

"He is false to you; so false, that by the power he holds over my dear father, he will force me to be his wife, and I—how can I say it?—have promised it."

Zillah, with a look of wild despair, fell at her feet, as if smitten by a thunderbolt. Her fears had been too true.

CHAPTER XIII. VENGEANCE.

As she fell, the door was thrown open, and there strode into the room the stalwart figure of Waubena, followed by Nelson and Dempsey, who marked the motions of the other two with a malevolent eye. Close behind them, with a

fierce expression on his dark but handsome face, was Coradi, the Mexican, unseen by the others.

"You have told her that I no longer love her," said Nelson, vindictively. "That is well, and I am sorry for her; but the worst is to come, I fear. This chief claims the girl as his prisoner, and will have her, or destroy the entire party."

"Ha!" said Dempsey, his eyes beginning to blaze. "I see your game, my boy."

Zillah, at the first sound of the voice she had loved, shuddered slightly in every nerve of her delicate frame, and started up, looking at him with a fixed gaze.

"You must speak again," she said, slowly; "I did not understand you."

"I am sorry to say it, but—"

"Liar! You are happy in the thought, for your face speaks louder than your words, mask it as you will. You did not need to use such a stratagem to be rid of me. Women of my race are too proud to give love unasked, and so, fare you well!"

"Wait," said Nelson, hoarsely. "It is not in my hands to decide. Chief, do you claim this girl?"

"Si," replied the chief, in Spanish. "She is mine."

"Not while I have a dagger and know how to use it," cried Zillah. "Help, my brother, help; they would destroy me."

Coradi heard her call, and leaped to her aid, flashing his glittering knife before the eyes of the chief with such a meaning in it that even Waubena recoiled. Nelson stamped three times upon the floor of the hut, and the grating of hinges and the hasty rush of feet succeeded, and directly about twenty men, fully armed, were in the little hut.

"Seize yonder traitor," cried Nelson, pointing to Coradi. "He has transgressed his oath."

"It is false!" cried Coradi, as the men made a rush at him. "Boys, listen to me and do me justice."

"He shall not speak," hissed Nelson. "Away with him; you know the place well."

But a murmur began to spread among the men. "Let him speak; give him fair play; Coradi has always been true," were among the murmurs he heard.

"He's done no wrong, boys," said Dempsey, who saw that a bargain had been made between the chief and Nelson, excluding his claims. "By our laws he has a right to be heard."

"Speak, then," said Nelson. "Say your say out, and see whether these men will stand by me or by you."

"I will speak," said Zillah. "You all see that man, your leader, and you all know that it was expected that I was to be his wife. And now, he has sold me to this barbarous chief, to be carried to a hopeless captivity, the horrors of which you know as well as I. And why? Because he finds that otherwise the chief will not give up this good woman whom he insults likewise by the offer of his love. I ask you as men, as white men, if you will permit this horrible act?"

"Not no! Hurrah! We'll stand by Zillah Coradi and her brother against any sneaking Comanche that ever crawled," cried a rough-looking man, who stood foremost. "What! we were Texans before we were outlaws, and we won't see a woman wronged."

Nelson ground his teeth in sullen rage, and turned to the chief, but he was gone.

"We might ask," said Dempsey, "how the captain dared show these Injins the way to the Secret Haunt. I never would have done it."

"Don't waste words idly, here," cried Nelson. "The chief has gone to gather his band, and we are doomed."

"Pooh," replied Bob Tenny. "Not a bit of it. Thar ain't over fifty of 'em, and we ar' good for any fifty Comanches that ever was whelped."

But they were mistaken. The chief appeared again immediately, and extended his hand to Nelson in an amicable manner.

"See," he said, "your young men do not want to see the white girl go into the wigwam of the Comanches. That is well, and Waubena will seek a wife among his own race. But let us be friends."

"That's the way to talk it," said Tenny. "The chief knows how to give up when he's beaten, and that's what I like to see in a man, no matter what's the color of his hide."

"Do not trust him," whispered Zillah to her brother. "There is some great treachery in his heart."

"I shall not trust him," replied her brother; "and the time is not far off when I shall call Brinsley Nelson to a heavy reckoning."

"My brother, life seems ended; and I could have loved him so well!"

"Do not give the villain a thought; but I shall not rest until I meet him face to face, sword to sword. Who takes command of the guard tonight, Brinsley Nelson?"

"You will take first half; I will take the last. It seems that you still allow me some little authority."

"You have no claim upon me which permits you to degrade my sister. Let me alone; our day of reckoning must come."

"It may come sooner than you expect," muttered Nelson, with a sidelong glance at the pair. "Order the men to return," he said aloud.

"We prefer the outside while the Indian stays," said one of the men. "It would be better for their safety to put the prisoners below."

"You are right, Forbes," said Nelson. "As we leave this place forever in a few days, the secret is of little moment now. See to it at once."

"Shall I blindfold them?"

"I think you had better; but go to my cabin first and bring the lady and gentlemen who are there."

Dunham and his wife were brought in blindfolded, and led away by Forbes, while Nelson followed with Mabel. Dempsey would have interfered, but a look from his leader stopped him.

"Shall I go with them, or stay here?" said Zillah to her brother.

"I think you had better go with her," replied Coradi. "But do as you like about it."

Bidding him be careful, she followed the others. They passed out at the back of the cabin, which formed such an angle with the octagonal walls of the ruin that no one could see them except from one direction, and none were in sight. Nelson touched a spring, and a door in the wall opened and they passed into a narrow passage, by which a flight of steps led downward, carved in stone by the hands of Aztec workmen, long ago. Here Nelson left them, and they passed in, hearing the door click behind them.

"Hard and fast," muttered Nelson. "Oh, my good, kind, considerate brethren; I will teach you to rebel against me!"

He passed out into the inclosure whence Coradi had already expelled the Indians, with the exception of the chief. Guards were pacing up and down, with their rifles ready, and two were posted just without the ruined archway. Nelson smiled in a grim way, and went into his own cabin, where the chief was waiting for him, and they had a long conference. In the evening, after supper, the chief rejoined his men, who were encamped outside, and by midnight nothing was heard except the tread of the sentries, and the Indians were apparently asleep, while the white men slept upon their arms in the center of the ruin. But, in the stillness of night, under the light of the stars, a deed of terrible import was performed. Suddenly, without warning, silent arrows sped, and every sentry fell, stricken to the heart, while over their bodies the Comanches swarmed in to do the work of death. Taken by surprise, hemmed in by the long lances of their enemies, the band was completely obliterated, with the exception of Dick Dempsey and Coradi, who, breaking through the circle of their enemies, reached the secret passage, and were safe for the present. But the first was severely wounded and likely to die, and Coradi gave up hope. He saw at once that the treachery of Nelson had destroyed them all, and that there was only one refuge from dishonor for Zillah, and that was in death by his hand.

The night passed and Nelson did not come near them. Perhaps he dreaded the vengeance of Coradi, and dared not face him. About mid-day an Indian came to the door of the passage, which Nelson had opened for him, and gave them food and drink, closed the stone door and went away. About three o'clock a strong party came down and forced the prisoners to accompany them into the open air.

"Are you strong enough to meet death by a brother's hand, if I find myself able to do it?" said Coradi.

"I call upon you, in the name of my mother, to do it! When I cover my face with my hands, the time will have come."

Coradi made no reply, but a lofty purpose came into his face as he felt for the pistols which he had concealed to see that they were safe. Not a man of the murdered party were to be seen, for their bodies were already under the sod. The Indians had only lost six of their number, for the surprise had been complete. Wau-bena was stalking about, with three scalps half-

concealed in the folds of his hunting-shirt, his dark face wearing an expression of elation, and Nelson was by his side.

"You find what it is to oppose yourself to me, Coradi," said he. "Your fellow-conspirators are dead, and you are in my power. Chief, order your men to march out and form in the open space. We will follow with the prisoners."

The Indians silently obeyed the signal of their chief, and they stood alone with the traitor and the chief.

"Waubena," said Nelson, "you have kept faith with me. There is the girl; I give her to you."

The chief advanced to seize her, and she crouched closer by her brother's side.

"Keep your word, my brother!" she cried, covering her face. "Nothing else can save me now."

Coradi stood with a pistol in each hand, his handsome face flushed with a strong purpose.

"One shot for you, Brinsley Nelson, one for her, one for myself. Thus we escape from your hands."

The pistol was already leveled, and Nelson was in the act of drawing a weapon, when a fearful volley from the woods tore through the Indian ranks, and the battle-cry of the Rangers rose shrill and clear as they came pouring in for vengeance. Wild shouts, a sea of excited faces, the roar of battle for a moment, and then Wau-bena, wounded and bleeding—for the chief had at once dashed out to join in the affray—appeared alone at the archway, closely pressed by Mad Tom, wielding a ponderous ax. The shield of the chief was beaten down, and he sunk powerless at the feet of his destroyer, gasping for breath and rapidly bleeding his life away.

"See to him, boys," cried Mad Tom. "Don't strike him again, for he has got his death. Now, Brinsley Nelson, I have met you, and this must end all."

"I surrender," said Nelson, quietly, "and have no wish to fight. I have done no wrong."

"Liar!" hissed a feeble voice. They looked down and saw that the wounded Dempsey had crawled to the feet of the party from the haunt below. "Ah, keep him away while I tell you all."

Nelson had made a rush at him, but was restrained by Western and Fenway.

"You see him there," cried Dempsey. "He is Bradshaw, the river-pirate, Bradshaw, the murderer and horse-thief, and we were members of his band. When you search the secret chambers below you will find that he is what I say."

Bradshaw, the river-pirate! Since the days of Morrell, no man was more hated upon the Mississippi than this infamous man, and now they had him. Weapons were half-drawn, and a circle of angry faces formed about him, but Western kept them back.

"I suppose it is of no use to fight against fate," said the prisoner, quietly. "I am Brinsley Nelson Bradshaw, and I will meet my fate like a man. But I do not go alone. I accuse that man, Walter Dunham, formerly a surgeon in St. Ancras parish, Louisiana, of being a *Resurrectionist*. I can prove it, and he dare not deny it."

"Father!" cried Mabel.

"It is false, but I cannot prove that it is so," replied Dunham. "Circumstances are against me."

"He broke open the grave of his own cousin, Joseph Myerle, of that parish, and the body was found in his house."

The Rangers began to scowl ominously, and mutterings, which are the sure precursors of the court of Judge Lynch, were plainly heard.

"Hold on," said Dempsey, faintly. "Give me a little brandy, but don't touch Mr. Dunham. He is all right, and that man lies!"

"Silence!" shrieked Nelson. "Do not dare to speak, or I will cut your heart out!"

He was dragged back, frantic with rage, and one of the Rangers put his flask to the white lips of the wounded man, who revived immediately.

Bradshaw is a nephew of Mr. Dunham's. He had forged the name of his uncle for a large sum, and, although he would not prosecute him, he drove him out of the State. From that hour Bradshaw swore vengeance, and when Joseph Myerle died we dug up the body and conveyed it to Dunham's house by night, and then sent word to the Vigilance Committee. They came and found the body, but Dunham escaped. That is the whole truth, so help me God."

Bradshaw wrenched himself from the hands of those who held him, drew a pistol and shot Dempsey through the head. As he turned, with

the smoking weapon in his hand, one barrel undischarged, he was confronted by the towering form of Wau-bena, bloody and threatening.

"Where are all my warriors? where? White man's scalp. Die!" shrieked the Indian.

With the last effort of expiring strength he whirled his hatchet over his head. The stroke of the heavy hatchet and the report of the pistol came together. Wau-bena was shot through the heart, and Bradshaw, with the hatchet buried to the handle in his brain, dropped as if struck down by an avenging bolt from heaven.

The last solemn rites were over, and the bodies of the victims were under the sod. Coradi showed them all the mysteries of the place, and upon his solemn affirmation that he had been deceived in the purpose of the band, which he had regarded as the nucleus of a force which was to attempt the liberation of Mexico, he was not harmed. Walter Dunham breathed the air freely, unstained by the shadow of crime, and the wife and daughter who had loved him so well shared in his joy.

The parting between Zillah and Mabel was a sad one, for they had learned to love each other; but, they parted with the promise that each should hear from the other often. Zillah had looked once at the dead face of Bradshaw, and then covered it.

"I loved him once; may God pardon the evil of his ill-spent life, as freely as I pray for his soul's rest."

Yantic, who had lain concealed throughout the fray, came out and fraternized with the Rangers, who received him with hearty good will. He followed Zillah and her brother to Mexico, and was not seen in Texas for over a year. Long before that, Tom Western and Mabel were married and settled upon a ranch not far from Dunham's.

Two years later. The plain bears a changed aspect. Where Dunham's small house had stood rose the walls of a fine Southern mansion, and all about lay shining fields, bright and fresh under the summer sun. Upon a slope two miles away was the house of Western, and Walter Dunham and his wife were standing in the doorway watching the approach of a party on horseback. As they came nearer they saw Mabel and her husband, the fair girl we have seen, now a happy wife and mother, their love for each other showing itself in their faces. Behind them rode a servant carrying a year old baby, who reached out his little hands and crowed in delight. But who is this standing on his head in the saddle? Who but our old friend Yantic, with the same whimsical manner as of yore. Next came Enrico Coradi, with a handsome lady riding by his side, and behind them Zillah, attended by a distinguished-looking gentleman in the gray uniform of a Mexican colonel of lancers. How is this?

Mexico has suffered another revolution, and Coradi's friends are in power. The ex-member of Bradshaw's band is high in power in his native country, and Zillah was married a month ago to Colonel Ramon Diaz, of the staff of the president. Yet she thinks sometimes with a chastened sorrow of the old wild days, when she was with her brother in the ancient ruin in which Bradshaw died.

Here too comes Jack Fenway, the same as of old, ready to fight or dance as the case may be. And the settlers come in from all quarters and have a merry meeting, and foot it under the Southern moon to the whispering music of the negro's violin. The old wild days are over, and those who deserved happiness are happy in each other's love.

THE END.

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